

Unsettled Narratives: Indigenous Absence and Vengeful Land in Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*,
Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*

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by

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ABSTRACT

Canada is a settler-colonial nation haunted by its long history of elimination and assimilation policies that cleared Indigenous peoples from the land for settlement. Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* reflect, and ultimately support, these policies through their depiction of marginalized Indigenous peoples who are dispossessed of their traditional territories. In each novel, the land metaphorically longs for its original inhabitants and the relationship it had with Indigenous groups; consequently, the land rejects the settlers who misuse it through the intrusive agricultural pursuits of farming and ranching. By applying foundational theories regarding settler colonialism as posited by Lorenzo Veracini and Patrick Wolfe, this study contends that the novels of Ostenso, Ross, and Watson participate in the removal of Indigenous peoples from the territory that is now Canada and legitimize the colonial project that allows settler communities to occupy these lands, in part by presenting Indigenous peoples as literal or metaphorical ghosts.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“it’s only by our lack of ghosts / we’re haunted”

— Earle Birney “Can. Lit.”

Despite Earle Birney’s claim, Canada is a nation full of ghosts that hauntingly remind settler Canadians of their violent history of colonization and genocide. In 2017, settler Canadians celebrated the country’s sesquicentennial and became increasingly unsettled by the recognition of the ghosts that haunt the festivities. In effect, they realized that they were celebrating a history of death and displacement. As settler Canadians challenged the ideal of a friendly and welcoming Canada, suddenly the familiar became strange. In “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud uses the term *unheimlich* (*unhomely*) to define the unsettled feeling that “arouses dread and horror” (218); the *uncanny* is “nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (240). For Canadians, the uncanny is the unacknowledged guilt and memory of a long history of stolen lands, broken treaties, and assimilation that accompanies the colonization project. As a result of the uncanny, settler Canadians recognize that something is not right about their presence on these territories. In “Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal ‘Ghosts’ and the Spectres of Settlement,” Warren Cariou suggests that this uncomfortable dual feeling of the familiar and the repressed “reflects a widespread and perhaps growing anxiety suffered by settlers regarding the legitimacy of their claims to belonging on what they call ‘their’ land” (727). Indeed, as settler Canadians learn more about the atrocities committed to erase Indigenous populations from this continent, they grow increasingly anxious about their illegitimate occupation of these lands.

Despite the uneasy feeling that comes with this realization, Canadians must confront this haunting. In *Spectres of Marx: The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Jacques Derrida claims that “[h]aunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (37). In Canada, the dominance of European settler-invaders over the land’s original Indigenous peoples creates an uneven power structure. In his Massey lectures *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, which discuss the ongoing problematic relationship between settler-invaders and Indigenous peoples in North America, Thomas King repeatedly states, “don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (29). Settler Canadians now know the truth about their colonial history, so they can no longer ignore it; therefore, they must begin to live their lives differently. Avery

Gordon suggests in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* that members of contemporary society should “look for lessons about haunting when there are thousands of ghosts” (64). Canadian society is haunted both by Indigenous victims of what Patrick Wolfe calls the settler-colonial “logic of elimination” (“Nation and MiscegeNation” 93) and by a false notion that Indigenous peoples and their cultures have been erased. Settler Canadians must look for the lessons that can be learned when they recognize the government policies and racist beliefs that created these historic hauntings. As Cynthia Sugars claims in “Haunted by (a Lack of) Postcolonial Ghosts: Settler Nationalism in Jane Urquhart’s *Away*,” several ghosts haunt Canadian history and culture: “the ghosts that European settlers and their descendants refused to recognize as legitimate, the ghosts of those whom they killed, and the ghosts that they recognized and subsequently appropriated” (5). The recognition of these three varieties of ghosts becomes essential to understanding Canada’s harsh colonial past.

In my research, I look for real and metaphorical hauntings in settler Canadian fiction, ghostly figures that inadvertently support the erasure of Indigenous peoples from society. My examination of these novels recognizes that metaphors of ghosts and haunting can contribute to a belief in the erasure of Indigenous peoples from these lands; however, this study does not validate that view. Indigenous peoples are not ghosts; they were and are still very much present and active in what is now called Canada. However, I argue that the settler-invader “logic of elimination” (Wolfe 93) results in the absence of Indigenous peoples from Canadian literary texts of the mid-twentieth century in order to justify their displacement from land taken over by settlers.

Before introducing the texts, I must discuss a term that I use throughout my thesis. I initially struggled with employing the term *settler-invader* to describe the Europeans who first came to live on this territory and their descendants who continue to benefit from treaties. The term has an inherent violence that I rejected when I began my studies. I preferred the term *settler-colonial* because it allowed a comfortable historical distance from which I could view my relationship with Indigenous signatories of Treaty 6, the territory on which I live. Since settlers claim colonialism is an historical event, a one-time occurrence that happened five hundred years ago, I believed myself to be innocent of the crimes of past Canadians and free from the responsibility of ensuring the implementation of treaty. I could talk of reconciliation and decolonization in metaphorical terms that did not affect me personally.

Once I learnt that the effects of colonization continue to the present day, I could no longer ignore my culpability in this uneven treaty relationship. As a settler-invader, I benefit from treaty agreements that allow settlement to occur in this country and government policies that continue the process of eliminating Indigenous groups: the economy benefits from the extraction of resources on Indigenous lands; the justice system unjustly favours settler-invaders. I recognize and accept the inherent violence of the term *settler-invader*, which accurately describes my presence on this land and my relationship with Indigenous peoples of Treaty 6. In using this term, I acknowledge that I benefit from my privileged status as a settler-invader, and I recognize that reconciliation begins with me.

The mid-twentieth-century Canadian novels *Wild Geese* by Martha Ostenso (1925), *As for Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross (1941), and *The Double Hook* by Sheila Watson (1959) depict settler-invader relationships with the land and with dispossessed Indigenous groups during an important time in Canada's troubled history. Although set on Indigenous territories, these novels ignore the painful and unrecognized histories of colonization while participating in the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the erasure of Indigenous peoples from narratives. The authors examine the chaos and disjunction of settler-invader society reflected in the hostile Canadian landscape and explore the uneasy relationship their characters have with the land. In "The World and the Home," Homi Bhabha refers to Freud's *unheimlich* and asks readers to "discover those who live in the unhomely house of Fiction" (152). While reading these texts, I question the problematic representation and erasure of First Nations peoples in the historic record and the "House of Fiction." Why do the novels depict empty lands when they were inhabited by Indigenous groups? Why do the texts suppress the Indigenous presence on the land while valorizing the settler-invader narrative? Finally, why do these texts depict the land as a malevolent force that attacks settler communities?

In each of these novels, I discovered Indigenous Others living in the margins of settler communities; indeed, these texts are haunted by what they attempt to displace and suppress, and they create a false history that legitimizes the colonial project of Indigenous removal. Moreover, the centrality of the land in each of these novels reinforces the importance of property to the project of settlement and colonization. The land is integral to the unbalanced relationship between settler-invader and Indigenous characters in these novels. Marginalized and dispossessed Indigenous characters appear as transients who wander aimlessly across their stolen

territories or who do menial work for settler-invaders. However, the earth refuses to let the invaders settle peacefully in their homes. I see the land as enacting revenge on the settlers and preventing them from being successful or content in their occupied spaces. The land is hostile because it rejects the endeavours of the newcomers, especially the destructive act of farming. In my examination of these three novels, I will demonstrate that Ostenso, Ross, and Watson attempt to write stories that justify the settler-invader presence on the land, which paradoxically refuses to let the colonial invaders settle peacefully upon it; ultimately, these texts create a false history that suggests that Indigenous peoples no longer exist and thus legitimizes the colonial project and Indigenous dispossession.

Stolen Lands

The land is an integral part of Canadian identity and remains an ongoing point of contention between Indigenous groups, governments, and settler citizens. As Renée Bergland argues in *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, “the land is haunted because it is stolen” (9). The stolen land worries settlers and reveals the guilt that comes with occupying this territory, and despite settler attempts to forget the atrocities of colonization, the land continues to remind Canadians of their violent history. As Cariou suggests, in Canadian prairie literature, “the land itself seems to remember, seems to be keeping an account” (729). The land remembers the injustices committed by settler-invaders and seeks to punish them for their crimes. The unequal relationship between settlers and Indigenous groups reveals itself in literary representations of the ungiving land and the cruel weather. Settler characters dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land, and it attempts to unsettle the unwelcome invaders. However, in these settler narratives, marginalized Indigenous characters never regain their territories, which ultimately reveals the overpowering success of the settler-invader project.

Modernism and Prairie Realism

Each of these texts are examples of Canadian modernist novels that attempt to “make it new,” as Ezra Pound expressed (265). Ostenso, Ross, and Watson enjoyed varying degrees of success with their texts, and each novel occupies a place in the Canadian literary canon. In *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction*, Colin Hill suggests that while Canadian authors experimented with modern themes, they did not embrace modernist techniques as fully as British and American authors did. However, Canadian modernists “explored the cultural conditions and great ‘themes’ of ‘modernity’: moral relativism, modern technology, the forces of urbanization

and industrialization, modern social and political ideas, moral and religious change and decline, human sexuality, evolving gender roles, and modern historical events” (7). Each novel in this study explores human sexuality, with premarital sex and children born out of wedlock; each also investigates shifting gender roles, with women doing work traditionally done by men. The novels examine moral relativism, with murder, violence, and adultery presented as neither inherently good nor evil. While Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* does not use conventionally modernist techniques, such as fragmentation, multivocality, and stream of consciousness, it does employ different points of view to reveal the internal thoughts of multiple characters, and it does use symbols to represent the feelings of key characters. Similarly, Ross’s *As for Me and My House* employs an unreliable first-person narrator to tell a story with an ambiguous ending. Watson’s *The Double Hook* experiments with form to create a highly fragmented text that uses allusion to impart additional layers of meaning to the novel. With publication dates ranging from 1925 to 1959, each novel serves as an example of modernism’s transformation of literature in Canada.

Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* and Ross’s *As for Me and My House* are works of prairie realism, a manifestation of modernism in Canada. Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook* does not fall into a parallel category because it is too allegorical to create a realistic depiction of the harsh realities of settler life in Western Canada. However, like the novels of Ross and Ostenso, Watson’s text portrays its characters’ alienation from the land, emotional repression or psychological turmoil, and social, moral, and technological changes that reflect major shifts occurring in twentieth-century North American society. Moreover, each of these novels represent a metaphorical wasteland that reflects the fraught relationship between settler-invaders and the bountiful land promised to settlers by the Canadian government. As Morris Owen Wee suggests in “Specks on the Horizon: Individuals and the Land in Canadian Prairie Fiction,” the common theme of barren, unforgiving land in these novels is not accidental: “The prairie became an important landscape in Canadian literature because it demonstrated graphically the isolation, vulnerability, and emptiness that immigrants felt whenever they settled in Canada” (20). Each of these texts experiments with narration to explore the hardships of settlement that compare with the urban despair depicted in well-known modernist texts such as T. S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” (1922). In *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1973), Laurence Ricou argues that for “writers of Canadian prairie fiction, the totality of the vacuum in the modern age was dramatically mirrored in their own physical landscape” (xi). In other words,

as Alison Calder and Robert Wardaugh state in “When Is the Prairie?”, Ricou claims that prairie realism is modernist, in that the emptiness of the landscape is “an analogue to the terrifying emptiness of the modern world” evident in international modernist texts (6). In each novel, the barren or unforgiving land represents a spiritual isolation or alienation from the safety of the European homeland. In their representations of the land, these authors explore the psychological aspects of the loneliness and fears of settlement in Western Canada.

Ricou and Dick Harrison, in his *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1977), are two early critics who theorized the distinctive characteristics of prairie realism and the relationship between the land and the settler in Canadian fiction. Writing in the 1970s, these critics represent the way settlers thought about the land at that time: *terra nullius* or empty lands devoid of human inhabitation, awaiting the arrival of willing settler-invaders who sacrificed to build a great country. Ricou and Harrison do not recognize the presence of Indigenous peoples of the prairies as they focus on the loneliness of “man” on the prairies and the challenges of settling a wild, terrifying land. Since the 1970s, viewpoints have shifted greatly. Settler Canadians now recognize the falsity of the claim of empty lands and their government’s culpability in clearing the plains or appropriating the lands of British Columbia to allow settlement to occur. Settlers can no longer ignore the truth about residential schools, broken treaties, and forced removals; these realizations highlight the violence of settlement and change the settler-invader relationship with the land and Indigenous peoples. Stephen Harper’s 2008 Residential School Apology¹ and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action*² further acknowledge a required shift in the way settler-invaders envision their relationship with the land and its original inhabitants.

Ricou’s study recognizes the now stereotypical image of a settler alone on the vast, harsh land, an image that prevails in each of these novels. Ricou argues that “Man on the prairie, as portrayed in Canadian fiction, is defined especially by two things: exposure, and an awareness of the surrounding emptiness” (ix). In *Wild Geese*, Caleb Gare appears as a lone figure crossing the bare prairie. In *As for Me and My House*, Mrs. Bentley leaves the confines of her stifling house

¹ On June 11, 2008, Stephen Harper addressed the House of Commons and formally apologized to former students for the atrocities committed on behalf of the Canadian government. The full text of the apology appears online: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>.

² The Canadian government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) on June 2, 2008. The Commission travelled across the country gathering testimony from residential school survivors. In June 2015, the TRC released the *Calls to Action* “to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation.” The document is available online at http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf.

to wander the border between prairie and town. In *The Double Hook*, James Potter rides through the bleak landscape after murdering his mother. However, the image of a lone human does not adequately convey the complicated settler-invader relationship with the land and its First Peoples that these characters exemplify. Ricou tries to understand the association between settlers and the land, but he leaves out Indigenous perspectives: “The response to the dictates of the land is a deep sense of bond to the land, which often coexists with the feeling that nature is man’s antagonist. In the absence of more congenial surroundings or human fellowship, vertical man looks to the horizontal and readily arable land for company. [...] [M]an is not only distinct from the land, but also, of necessity, rooted in the land from which he derives his nourishment” (7). Ricou believes settlers have an intense bond with the land, and he personifies it as company for the lonely pioneer. For Ricou, the land paradoxically becomes both friend and foe. It provides food and income, but it also tries to remove the settler, as seen by the severe weather that plagues these novels. Ricou’s “rooted but distinct” argument ignores the original dispossessed Indigenous inhabitants as he suggests that settlers somehow naturally belong to the prairies.

Harrison builds on Ricou’s idea and further ignores Indigenous presence from the prairies. For Harrison, prairie realism explores the challenges of settlers trying to establish a European-type civilization on the prairie. He claims Canadian prairie fiction “is rooted in that first settlement process in which the pioneer faced two main obstacles: the new land and the old culture. The land was a challenge not only physically but psychologically; like all unsettled territory it had no human associations, no ghosts, none of the significance imagination gives to the expressionless face of the earth after men have lived and died there” (ix). Like Ricou, Harrison uses the term ‘rooted’ to suggest settler-invaders inherently belong to this land. While valorizing settler-invader efforts to overcome the harsh realities of establishing permanent settlements on the prairies, Harrison claims the land was completely empty of all human presence. He supports the settler-invader fallacy of *terra nullius* that rationalized European colonization of North America. However, as historian Lorenzo Veracini argues in “On Settleness,” “[t]he very idea of settling the land, an act that is inevitably premised on the perception of ‘empty lands,’ is based on the systematic disavowal of indigenous presences. [...] [A]s far as settlers are concerned, they are the first consciousness the place they settle has ever had” (4). While erasing tens of thousands of years of prairie history, Harrison supports Ricou’s claim that the land was an extremely difficult and unforgiving place to settle. He condemns the

land as ghostless and featureless, a blank slate awaiting the presence of the cultured European presence. Harrison fails to recognize that his settler understanding of “empty lands” reflects an institutional disavowal of the original Indigenous presence on these territories that allowed settler-invader projects to succeed in Western Canada.

Like other more recent settler scholars, such as Brian Johnson and Cynthia Sugars, I recognize the land as a place of settler-invader violence that continues to haunt the region. Calder and Wardhaugh suggest that “[t]he category ‘Canadian prairies’ came into being as a consciously constructed space, an entity deliberately produced in order to fulfill specific economic and imperial needs” (4). The numbered treaties allowed for settlement of the prairies, but the promises made to European settlers failed to live up to the harsh realities of living on the plains. As Diane Dufva Quantic observes in *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction*, “[a]n underlying assumption is that the land belongs to those who know best how to use it. Settlement brings change to the land itself” (xvii). Homesteaders believed they belonged to the land because they could “improve” it through the acts of farming and ranching that changed the land irrevocably while forcing Indigenous peoples off it.

The narrators of these novels openly discuss the land and settlers who live upon it, but each text fails to recognize Indigenous claims to the land. Moreover, Indigenous characters exist on the margins of the novels, perpetually separated from their territories. The novelists are settler-invaders who participated in and benefitted from the government projects of assimilation and removal. The arrival of homesteaders on the plains changed the land and Indigenous societies forever. From the beginning of the colonial project, European settlers intended to take over the lands, eliminating the Indigenous presence and claim to the territory. As Patrick Wolfe observes in “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” the “logic of elimination” is an ongoing process that “strives to replace Indigenous society with that imported by the colonisers” (93). In the novels of Ostenso, Ross, and Watson, settler-invaders are well-established in their communities, while Indigenous characters are almost completely absent from the lands and the texts. The novels depict the success of colonial projects that support the homesteaders’ claim to the territory while keeping Indigenous characters perpetually dispossessed. In the novels, settler-invaders benefit from the settlement, but neither the characters nor their authors seem to recognize the injustice of their actions. Ostenso, Ross, Watson, and their settler-invader characters are active participants who benefit from the structure

of settler-colonialism, and they are implicated in textual depictions of ongoing dispossession and marginalization.

Haunted Canada

Canadian settlers are doubly haunted by stolen lands and Indigenous dispossession. As settlers established themselves in a terrifying territory, they created a past that mimicked British history. In his “Conclusion” to the *Literary History of Canada*, Northrop Frye suggests that “Canada has not had, strictly speaking, an Indian war: there has been much less of the ‘another redskin bites the dust’ feeling in our historical imagination, and only Riel remains to haunt the later period of it” (341). Writing in 1965, Frye does not recognize the genocidal deaths of Indigenous peoples in Canada, nor does he acknowledge that Indigenous peoples are vital members of contemporary society; therefore, he supports a falsely non-violent history of Canada. Frye goes on to argue that “[l]iterature is a conscious mythology: as society develops, its mythical stories become structural principles of story-telling, its mythical concepts, sun-gods and the like, become habits of metaphorical thought” (348). Through Canada’s literature, Frye argues, a mythology develops that claims settlers belong on and have a right to these lands and that Indigenous peoples are no longer on their land. The myth is familiar to settler Canadians: the early fur traders and settlers bravely explored these unknown lands, brought “civilization” to the original inhabitants, and established the communities of this multicultural nation. The myth of a vast wilderness and its subsequent taming results in positive ghosts who deliberately support the settler-colonial project through the discourse of exploration and progress. However, settlers cannot escape the negative ghosts that continue to unsettle their claims to the land. As Canadians learn the true history of their nation, they can no longer accept the foundational myths that support their society. In short, settlers are haunted by the unacknowledged guilt of the colonial project. Eve Tuck and C. Ree argue in “A Glossary of Haunting” that this haunting “is the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society’s assurances of innocence and reconciliation” (642). Settlers cannot free themselves from their collective memories, nor can they proclaim their innocence of these crimes.

Settler Depictions of Indigenous Peoples

Connected to their fear of Nature, their unacknowledged guilt, and their “logic of elimination,” settler-invaders deny Indigenous peoples a modern existence through the creation of stereotypes. Settlers need the land to be empty, so in their fiction, Indigenous peoples exist as

either transient and lazy characters or members of a “dead or dying race.” In *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures*, Terry Goldie explains that the colonial narrative “shapes the indigene into an historical artefact, a remnant of a golden age that seems to have little connection to anything akin to contemporary life” (17). For settlers, Indigenous peoples can exist only as artefacts of their pre-contact selves; any other representation contradicts the myth of the “dying race.” Therefore, Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* and Watson’s *The Double Hook* depict Indigenous male characters who wander aimlessly across their ancestral homelands while settlers diligently put the land to beneficial use. Indigenous males in Ross’s *As for Me and My House* are nonexistent; only an Indigenous female appears in the novel. The reason for this impermanence and absence is clear: settler-invaders benefit from the myth of the disappearing Aboriginal person because settler claims to the land are strengthened by the removal of the original inhabitants. As Tuck and Ree claim, “Indigenous peoples must be erased, must be made into ghosts” (6). The erasure and subsequent ghosting allow invaders to settle comfortably in their homes once they secure their property. Relieved of their lands and forced into invisibility on reserves, Indigenous people remain voiceless on the margins, almost imperceptible to readers who skim over the texts and quickly forget their appearance.

While the novels remove Indigenous characters from the land, they mythologize settlers’ historic claim to and relationship with the land. To strengthen their claim to the land, settler-invaders must present themselves as the rightful indigenous occupants, while possessing the territories of Indigenous groups. Goldie observes, “Canadians have, and long have had, a clear agenda to erase this separation of belonging. The white Canadian looks at the Indian. The Indian is the Other and therefore alien. But the Indian is indigenous and therefore cannot be alien. So the Canadian must be alien. But how can the Canadian be alien within Canada?” (12). This paradoxical question haunts settler-invaders in the three novels studied in this thesis. The characters present themselves as belonging to the land, but they cannot settle comfortably because they fear the return of Indigenous inhabitants. Goori scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues in “Writing Off Indigenous Sovereignty: The Discourse of Security and Patriarchal White Sovereignty” that settler-invaders have an “anxiety of dispossession” (93), so “patriarchal white sovereignty operates ideologically, materially, and discursively to reproduce and maintain its investment in the nation as a white possession” (88). The novels of Ostenso, Ross, and Watson

support the patriarchal, settler-invader claim to the land and the investment of the colonial project of settlement.

Chapter Overview

Chapter two examines Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, which was published in 1920 and won an American literary award.³ The novel depicts a community of European settlers who live as homesteaders on Treaty 2 territory in central Manitoba. Indigenous peoples of this novel are limited to a small group in the community, and in response to the displacement of Indigenous characters, the land avenges the settler mistreatment by destroying Caleb Gare, the merciless patriarch, as he tries to force his fields to obey his will, in a parallel to his ruthless control over the members of his family. His strangely erotic relationship with his beloved flax field ultimately leads to his gruesome death when on the land. In its resolution, the novel supports a balanced settler-invader presence on the land, but Indigenous characters remain dispossessed of their territories as they continue to live in the margins of the community.

Chapter three discusses Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, a novel in diary form told from the perspective of Mrs. Bentley, the wife of a failing, unbelieving Protestant minister. Set in the Great Depression, the novel describes the Bentleys' lives in the small prairie town of Horizon during their last year in the ministry. The drought and its accompanying dust storms haunt the couple, the town, and the surrounding agricultural community as they struggle to survive after five successive years of failed crops. This small community is predominantly Anglo-Canadian, and the novel's only Indigenous character appears when the Bentleys vacation at their friend Paul's family ranch. The novel ends with the Bentleys adopting a child and moving to the relative safety of the city as the drought torments the farming community. The ambiguous ending suggests that although settlers continue to struggle they remain on the hostile land and desperately try to survive upon it.

Chapter four explores settler-invader relationships with the land and Indigenous groups in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*. The novel portrays a settler version of the Secwépemc demi-god, Coyote, as he oversees the lives of settlers in a drought-ridden valley. While the novel's

³ In "The Sensations of the 1920s: Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* and Mazo de la Roche's *Jalna*," Faye Hammill states that Ostenso "submitted *Wild Geese* to a contest for the best North American first novel, sponsored by *The Pictorial Review*, the publisher Dodd, Mead, and Company, and the Hollywood studio Famous Players-Lasky. She beat 1,389 competitors to win \$13,500, an unprecedentedly large sum for a literary prize, and her novel was published serially and in volume form as well as being filmed" (75).

setting is universalized, Watson authored the novel after teaching at Dog River, a town located on unceded territory in Interior British Columbia. Watson's novel portrays the ghost of a woman, in first drafts an Indigenous woman, who was murdered by her son and continues to roam the valley after her death. The published novel contains two identifiably Indigenous characters: Kip and Angel, who live amongst the valley's settlers, not on the apparently vacant reserve nearby. Despite the intrinsic power of European landholders, Coyote reigns over these lands and its people, and at the novel's conclusion he blesses the arrival of a baby whose birth promises to bring the settler community together.

J. Edward Chamberlin states in *If This is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?: Finding Common Ground* that "stories give meaning and value to the places we call home" (1). The novels of Ostenso, Ross, and Watson tell the story of colonization in Western Canada—the history of the dispossession of Indigenous nations by European homesteaders who established settler societies that they call home—and the novels give meaning to settler-invader experiences. These novels are considered canonical works of Canadian literature, and they continue to be taught in schools and universities across the country. Essentially, the novels participate in the settler project of elimination as they focus on the difficult, but eventually successful, process of taming "empty lands." The corresponding marginalization of Indigenous characters in the novels supports Canada's removal and assimilation attempts, and by erasing these characters from the land, these novels value settler experiences and ignore Indigenous contributions to settlement in Canada. The near absence of Indigenous peoples from the spaces inhabited by the characters of these novels offers an opportunity to explore early expressions of strained relationships that haunt Canadians through the continued legacy of colonialism in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 2: REAFFIRMING THE SETTLER-INVADER PROJECT IN MARTHA OSTENSO'S *WILD GEESE*

Published in 1925, Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* is an early work of prairie realism that refuses to glamourize the pioneer lifestyle as it describes the harsh realities of homesteading on Treaty 2 territory in Manitoba, Canada.⁴ The novel begins with the arrival of Lind Archer, the new schoolteacher who lives with the Gare family during the school term from early spring to late autumn. Lind's perspective allows the reader to understand the greed that motivates Caleb Gare as he subjects his family to a life of cruelty and hard labour. Gare is of British descent and views the land as property. He believes himself superior to his Scandinavian neighbours, so he plots against them to gain more land to bring under his control. His pecuniary view of the land contrasts with his daughter Judith's synergic relationship with untouched land. Caleb's insatiable need to possess and control more land eventually leads to his demise when the land exacts its revenge on the covetous homesteader. After his death, a placid "Indian summer" falls over the land, and the Gare family finally rests after years of toil.

While the text depicts the difficult lives of the Gare family and other members of settler-invader communities living in Oeland and Yellow Post, Ostenso's novel contains Indigenous peoples, who are dispossessed of their traditional lands. These Indigenous characters are powerless and voiceless in the novel, except for Malcolm, a former hired hand, and John Tobacco, the mail carrier. Ostenso relies on problematic stereotypes to suggest that Indigenous peoples are unwelcome on traditional territories now settled under the direction of the Government of Canada's homesteading project. As a result of this displacement, the land rejects settlers and threatens them within the false safety of their homes. The community cannot settle peacefully because the land haunts them with wind and fire; moreover, before the novel begins, the waters of the land take the lives of several community members, resulting in a haunting presence that affects laws governing the community.

The ongoing threat of the land prevents settler-invaders from feeling at home on their homesteads. Instead, farm families struggle to grow successful crops in soil that refuses to aid

⁴ In his careful study of the novel's setting, "The Geography of Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*," Robert Lawrence asserts that Oeland is based on an actual place. Referring to Lyn Tallman's 1927 biographical sketch "Martha Ostenso," Lawrence notes that "[Ostenso] taught at Hayland, a few miles from The Narrows, Lake Manitoba, about one hundred miles northwest of Winnipeg. [...] Hayland was, like the fictitious Oeland, settled late in the nineteenth century, mainly by people with Scandinavian backgrounds, and in any of the Scandinavian languages 'Oeland' and 'Hayland' are pronounced in a similar way" (112).

them in their endeavours. In *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction*, Dick Harrison recognizes the threat that keeps homesteaders fearful of their surroundings: “Ostenso does not seem to realize why the settlers are alienated from the soil. She presents her northern Manitoba people at odds with the land ostensibly because they are enslaved to it and it is a harsh master” (109). While Ostenso does portray the land as cruel entity, I believe the alienation stems from the process of settlement, not enslavement as Harrison claims. Throughout the narrative, the land remembers the long-lasting, respectful relationship with Indigenous inhabitants; therefore, it cannot accept the presence of settler-invaders who view the land as property and destroy its natural beauty through agriculture. As a result of this refusal, the community struggles against the elements and the harsh land for survival and prosperity. Illness, injury, and death challenge the success of the homesteads as much as the constant threats of drought, wind, and fire. Although the novel ends with Caleb Gare’s gruesome death on the land, Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* ultimately legitimizes the Canadian homesteading project on the prairies by supporting the removal of Indigenous peoples and creating a ‘happy-ending’ narrative that reaffirms notions of settler-invader belonging.

This chapter begins with an exploration of settler-colonialism as it applies to the homesteaders of Oeland before moving on to discuss the Gare family and the community as seen through the perspective of Lind Archer, the newly arrived schoolteacher who boards with the Gares. This chapter then discusses Caleb Gare, his constant need for more land, and his domineering approach to farming that relies on the forced labour of his family. After a discussion of Judith Gare’s special bond with the land, this chapter addresses the novel’s marginalized Indigenous community and their interactions with settler-invaders to contend that two of the novel’s Indigenous males, John Tobacco and Malcolm, voluntarily retreat from their territory. Finally, this chapter examines the land’s act of vengeance against Caleb Gare and subsequent blessing of the remaining members of the Gare family.

Homesteading and the Land

Ostenso’s Norwegian immigrant status provides her with a settler-invader perspective and explains her representations of Indigenous peoples. She benefitted from settler-colonial policies of removal and assimilation that allowed her and her family to prosper in North America. In “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” Patrick Wolfe explains that “the primary motive for elimination is not race but access to territory. Territoriality is settler

colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (388). In Canada, the implementation of reserves and residential schools actively removed Indigenous groups from the prairies and cleared the land for settlement. In *Wild Geese*, the homesteaders stake claims, create a community called Oeland, and work to "improve" the land according to guidelines set out by the Canadian government. Ostenso's prairie appears remarkably void of Indigenous populations. However, as Brian Johnson claims in "Beyond Regionalism: Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* and the Northern Nation," the novel is "preoccupied with indigeneity" (129). Although few Indigenous characters exist in the novel, their absence haunts the text and reinforces settler attempts to appear as indigenous to these new lands.

An important aspect of settler colonialism in the novel is the agricultural use of the land; as Wolfe claims, "the ideological justification for the dispossession of [Indigenous nations] was that 'we' could use the land better than they could" (389). The novel's villain, English-Canadian homesteader Caleb Gare, and other European homesteaders make the land profitable, according to European standards, while systematically dispossessing Indigenous peoples of territory. The Oeland settlement and the Gare family exist precariously between success and failure depending on the weather, the land, and fires that threaten to destroy crops and homesteads. While Treaty 2 opened the territory to Euro-Canadian settlement, in the novel, the land refuses to let the immigrants settle comfortably in their new homes. They own property, but they remain haunted by a fear of the immense prairie that works to liberate itself from settler appropriation and misuse as it plots to avenge its mistreatment through the destruction of greedy farmers like Caleb Gare.

Discussion about the land in Ostenso's novel follows two primary areas of focus: the land as a psychological reflection of the main characters, and the land as an angry, cruel, independent force. The land reflects the inner turmoil of the Gare family, but my discussion about settler-colonialism centres on the prairie's hostility toward homesteaders. In *Vertical Man / Horizontal World*, Ricou argues that "Ostenso is conscious of the inherent cruelty of the prairie and of the great emptiness which encircles man in this landscape" (74). Ricou recognizes the malevolence of the land in Ostenso's text, but he does not connect it to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Additionally, he does not see the soil as complicit in Caleb's doom. Harrison agrees with Ricou's idea of the cruel land, but he argues that in Ostenso's novel "the English-speaking settlers remain spiritually alienated from the land" (101). Building on Ricou's argument, Harrison notes the disconnect between settlers and the land, but he stops short of suggesting that

settler-invaders do not belong or that the prairie purposefully works against the colonial project. He supports the idea that settlers view the land as a thing to be tamed through agriculture, which negates a close relationship between the two.

In contrast to these early critics, Johnson represents recent critical approaches to the land and Indigenous characters. He recognizes the inherent support for the settler-invader project found within Ostenso's text: "the regionalist and universalist aesthetics of *Wild Geese* conceal a powerful nation-building ideology and a legitimizing allegory of settler-invader national formation" (128). I agree with Johnson; Ostenso's novel supports the mythical idea of Canada built by the sacrifice and eventual prosperity of agricultural immigrants. The homesteaders in the novel toil to create a successful community on the prairies, and they do not lose hope or determination when nature intervenes to remove them from the land. While the novel depicts settler deaths on the land, *Wild Geese* supports the settler-colonial project through the removal or marginalization of Indigenous peoples from the homesteading community and the Gare family's ongoing, respectful presence on the appeased land after the death of the patriarch.

Lind Archer and Haunted Homesteaders

While the novel centres on the Gare family, outsider character Lind Archer provides the lens through which readers view these homesteaders and the surrounding community. From the moment of her arrival, she recognizes a strange atmosphere within the Gare home. Eventually, Lind understands that the Gares live in misery as they work the land for Caleb. She tells the other outside character, Mark Jordan, "[t]hat's what's wrong with the Gares. They all have a monstrously exaggerated conception of their duty to the land—or rather to Caleb, who is nothing but a symbol of the land" (93). Lind explicitly connects the tyranny of the land to Caleb while implying that the family's misery stems from their unnatural, almost slave-like devotion to both the soil and Caleb. Likewise, her interactions with settler-invader and Indigenous characters reveals the fear of the land that plagues the people of Oeland and Yellow Post and the corresponding dispossession of Indigenous peoples. In *Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction*, Margot Northey argues that "[t]he mood of the story is one of fear" (63). The fear that haunts the novel comes from homesteaders who dread the unknown, but it also stems from the land which actively threatens the community. Soon after her arrival, Lind recognizes the dark forces that frighten the settlement: "And then in a moment, she was overwhelmed by her helplessness against the intangible thing that held them there, slaves to this

place. It extended farther back than Caleb, this power, although it worked through him” (38). Lind’s position as visitor gives her a fresh perspective from which to view the land that she identifies as an enslaving, malicious force. She knows that something holds these people to the land and punishes them for their presence, a powerful force that binds settler-invaders to the land, and she fears its power.

As Lind travels about the countryside visiting homesteading families, the novel’s narrator provides details about their houses that further indicate the oppressive fear that haunts the community. The buildings protect settler-invaders from the prairie, but families remain haunted by the threat of destruction. These families uphold foundational Canadian literature theorist Northrop Frye’s *garrison mentality*, which he defines in this way:

Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological “frontier,” separated from one another and from their American and British cultural sources: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable setting—such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality. (342)

Although there exists a permanence with settlement, the fear of the landscape haunts settler-invaders, who are separated from their European homelands. The great fear of the unknown wilderness becomes a barrier to peaceful settlement in the country and results in laws being developed that work to protect settler-invaders from the threat of nature. By holding onto laws governing civilization, settler-invaders try to feel safe within the terrifying natural world that surrounds their settlements and haunts their ongoing presence on these stolen lands.

To protect themselves from the threat of the land, elements, and unseen enemies, settler-invaders build homes that reinforce their permanence on the landscape. The Gare house is a “rough, unpainted log house” that Caleb thinks is adequate for the needs of the family (113). The narrator implies that their log house is drafty and in need of repair, but Caleb’s greed and desire to own more property prevents him from spending money on what he believes are unnecessary improvements. The Gares’ closest neighbours, the Sandbos, “boasted a frame house, and a wire fence around their buildings, not a sagging wooden one such as the Gares did with” (24). The Sandbos’ frame house shows their intent to establish themselves on the prairie and their

appreciation of the beauty of nature that Caleb Gare does not possess. Four generations of the Icelandic Bjarnassons also live in a permanent home, a “great stone house on the lake” (45), implying their enduring presence on the land. Although the houses vary in building materials, they suggest a permanence of settlement. However, despite the presumed safety of their houses, Oeland’s settlers remain fearful of the land.

As Lind adjusts to life in the community, she recognizes that the settlers have their own set of rules, including communal access to the land and expected societal behaviours. Lind begins a relationship with Mark, and as the relationship develops, she becomes mindful of the settlement’s reaction to their courtship: “Lind was wisely aware that she could not see much of Mark without causing comment of a malicious nature among the settlers. The intolerance of the earth seemed to have crept into their very souls” (131). Consciously aware of her outsider standing in the community, Lind knows that she must obey the community’s rules. However, she reverses the relationship between settler and land. She believes that the land makes the settler intolerant, not that the settler makes the land so. She thinks the harshness of the land infects the community and causes them to be malicious about her relationship with Mark, but she does not see that the intolerance stems from the mistreatment of the land through farming and the community’s fear of the unknown, as explained by Frye’s “garrison mentality.” The vast expanse of land that surrounds the community results in the formation of specific rules that govern the settlement and bind its members together despite the terrifying prairie wilderness.

The settler code of behaviour controls life in the community, especially as it relates to survival in the harsh environment. Some settler-invaders suspend their property rights to allow others to come onto private property to fish: “At Oeland no game laws were taken into account except those which the settlers agreed among themselves were good. Fishing in the lakes of those who were fortunate enough to have them on their land was open to those who did not have them, most of the year round. It had become such an old custom that the owner’s right in the matter had been lost sight of” (157). Mimicking the rights of Indigenous people to hunt game or fish freely on the land, the settlers mutually agree to share access to the lake on which Bjarnasson’s homestead sits. Since the bodies of two settlers who died during a storm on the lake remain unrecovered, Erik Bjarnasson refuses to let anyone take fish from the lake (49). However, Caleb arrogantly disobeys the wishes of Bjarnasson; he sends Martin, his eldest son, to gather fish from the lake. Despite incurring Caleb’s wrath, Martin rejects his father’s actions: “There were

ruthless things a man might do honourably, such as violating another's property to secure needed food for those dependent upon him. But what he had been sent out to do was neither honourable nor necessary" (158). Recognizing the shamefulness of his mission, Martin refuses to act like his father. Instead, he honours the rules of his community when he follows the wishes of the Bjarnassons and disagrees with Caleb's methods. Ostenso's narrator purposefully sets up this contrast between Caleb and other settlers. As a settler who "love[s] the land" (158), Martin develops a balanced relationship with it; subsequently, he knows that it is "folly to seed the worn-out east field" (17). While depicting Caleb's actions as reprehensible and greedy, through Martin, the narrator advocates for a harmonious relationship between homesteaders and the land—one that permits agricultural pursuits and property rights with moderation and respect for the land and others.

Ghosts of settler-invaders who have died on the land haunt their families and reinforce the community's fear of nature. The two dead fishermen serve as a reminder of the ongoing threat of a vengeful land that resists the presence of European settlers. Likewise, the death of Fusi Aronson's brothers haunt the text. When Fusi first meets Lind, he tells her about the death of his brothers during a blizzard, when an illness such as smallpox was also raging: "[Caleb] took the lives of two of my brothers. There was epidemic here with the Indians some years back. It was a snowstorm and my brothers asked in at his door. They were blind from the storm. They were not sick—my brothers. But Caleb Gare feared the sickness—it was the devil sickness—he feared for himself. And he closed the door in their faces" (29). Fusi refers to a contagious sickness that spreads amongst Indigenous inhabitants, another means of eliminating their population. Caleb fears the illness and breaks the unspoken laws of the community by refusing to shelter the Aronson brothers. Their deaths haunt the text and remind the reader of the harshness of the land and the cruelty of Caleb Gare. Like the land, Fusi remembers Caleb's crimes and plots his revenge, which he inadvertently exacts while burning willows in preparation for spring planting (303). The dead family members reinforce the community's fear of the cruel land, and they serve as a constant reminder of the precariousness of life on the prairies.

Although unseen, the wind also haunts the settlers and threatens their homesteads with destruction through fire. On the fateful night of the harvest dance, the wind becomes a messenger of ill-will that only Lind understands: "A wind was coming up, and whistled thinly under the eaves of the log house. It made its way into Lind's mood and haunted her. Again there came to

her the feeling that something evil was in store” (300). Lind remains conscious of the hostility of the land and the wind while in the Gare house, and the mournful wail of the wind disturbs the peace of the evening and influences Lind’s emotional state. The explicit use of the verb “haunted” suggests that Lind cannot relax as she prepares for the masquerade because she recognizes the foreboding, threatening message of the wind, which causes her mood to shift from excitement about the dance to apprehension about the future. She appears to be the only person in the house who notices the haunting wind that threatens the family and their community.

Caleb Gare and Land as Property

Caleb acts as a malicious force within the settler-invader community. His tyrannical, manipulative presence brings a sense of gloom to his family and fellow settlers. In his discussion about Caleb’s motivations, Johnson suggests, “Caleb is an archetypal settler-invader who treacherously and single-mindedly seeks to appropriate all of the land in the area in a compulsive repetition of the colonizing impulse” (129). Caleb schemes to acquire more property that must be made profitable under his control. In the settler-invader understanding of productivity, he cannot bear to see the land sitting unused, and he greedily tries to acquire as much arable land as possible, often acting dishonourably to achieve these goals. He blackmails Fusi Aronson into exchanging his valuable timber plot for Caleb’s worthless muskeg (67-68), and he threatens Thorvald Thorvaldson into giving up a half section of land (191). In an attempt to explain Caleb’s motivations, Ostenso’s narrator describes Caleb as a reflection of the land: he “could not be characterized in the terms of human virtue or human vice—[he was] a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence” (31). Inhuman in this description, Caleb mirrors the cruel, unforgiving nature of the rocky soil upon which settlers depend. The negative words reflect misunderstandings of the land and suggest that the land creates the tyrant in its image, rather than the tyrant affecting the soil by his actions.

Despite the financial success of his homestead, the land refuses to allow Caleb to thrive mentally, physically, or spiritually in the homesteading process. Like Lind, Mark Jordan recognizes the strained relationship between settlers and the land: “They seem to have no confidence in the soil—no confidence in anything save their own labour” (93). Mark notices that settler-invaders give themselves completely to the land, yet it refuses to acknowledge or welcome their sacrifice as it creates a distrust within the community. Mark believes the land

greedily and silently crushes settler-invaders in its refusal to submit willingly to settlement. The lack of confidence suggests their uneasiness; they give their energy to the soil but receive little in return for their laborious investment. They live with the constant knowledge that natural disasters or poor weather can destroy their progress instantaneously.

The homesteaders demand everything from the soil but give nothing in return, so the land rejects their presence. Unlike the territory's original Indigenous occupants, the settlers do not have a deep connection to this place. In *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times*, Neal McLeod states that "Indigenous people remain attached to an area of land over an extended period of time. This connection is manifested through such things as the knowledge of plants, sacred sites, and songs" (19). Indigenous peoples' deep connection to the land creates a bond that settler-invaders cannot replicate because they do not have the stories and culture of place, and they see the land primarily in financial terms. Additionally, mass settlement of the prairies only began once the numbered treaties were signed, beginning in 1871 to 1877. Settler-invaders lack the multi-generational knowledge of the area that Indigenous groups possess. The combination of the notion of land-as-realty and the speed of settlement resulted in a marked change in the treatment of the land.

The breaking of the land for agricultural purposes suggests a figurative and continual rape perpetrated by settlers who try to make the land profitable. While discussing the idea of haunting in the literature of the prairies in "Haunted Prairie: Aboriginal 'Ghosts' and the Spectres of Settlement," Warren Cariou argues that "[i]t is farming then—farming figured as rape—which is the great unpardonable assault on the land" (729). In *Wild Geese*, the land remembers the destruction caused by settler-invaders as it continues its process of haunting. In Caleb's farming endeavours, he mistreats the land, rich with the promise of fertility and wealth, while exercising his dominion over it. The narrator explains that "it was a challenge to Caleb himself to force from the soil all that it would withhold" (224). Through farming, Caleb offends the soil in his attempt to take everything from it for financial gain. Because he sees the land in monetary terms, he cannot have a cooperative relationship with it. Rather, he delights in the idea of land as property, a signifier of wealth, and he enjoys the challenge of growing crops because he believes his occupation makes him a fine example of a man.

While showing his worth as an excellent farmer, Caleb becomes preoccupied with his flax field, which takes on feminine attributes. The crop is particularly difficult to grow and

demands all of Caleb's attention. When he is with the flax, the rest of his world ceases to concern him, and he becomes possessed with what the land can produce as he compulsively returns to it to check on his crop:

While he was raptly considering the tender field of flax—now in blue flower—[his wife] Amelia did not exist to him. [...]

Caleb would stand for long moments outside the fence beside the flax. Then he would turn quickly to see that no one was looking. He would creep between the wires and run his hand across the flowering, gentle tops of the growth. A stealthy caress—more intimate than any he had ever given to woman. (152)

Caleb's stunted relationship with the rest of his family prevents him from expressing any form of love or kindness. He gives his attention to his flax because that is the only way that he can prove his success to the world. His daily examination of his fields allows him to express his desire through covert touches, but his attention expresses his greed and desire for power, not love; the crop and the land are important to Caleb only in their physical manifestation of his success as a farmer. While Caleb proves his power to the community, the feminized land cannot rebuke or return Caleb's greedy touch.

Ironically, Caleb never works the soil that he covets. He thinks of himself as a successful farmer, but his children labour for him. During haying, Caleb observes his children as they work: "Caleb sat in the cart patiently watching the growing stacks. Occasionally he gave an encouraging word to Charlie or rebuked Ellen for her carelessness. [...] The stacks grew, large, smooth and rain-proof, gratifying to the eye of Caleb Gare. It was product of *his* land, result of *his* industry. As undeniably his as his right hand, testifying to the outer world that Caleb Gare was a successful owner and user of the soil" (223). Caleb does no physical work on the farm, but he does not hesitate to take ownership of his children's labour. The narrator's use of italics to emphasize *his* work indicates Caleb's understanding that the success stems from his labour. However, Harrison notices that Caleb's success emanates from his brutal treatment of the land and his family: "he exhausts his land just as he overworks his family" (112). Caleb's greed prevents him from caring that his family and land are overworked because he forces both to provide the wealth that ensures his high status in the community. As products of Caleb, the children guarantee the ongoing success of the farm, and Caleb claims their work as the result of

his own industry. Caleb prides himself on his ownership and use of the soil, but his success depends upon squeezing the greatest amount of profit from the land and his family.

Judith Gare and the Land

Unlike Caleb, his youngest daughter, Judith, has a relationship with the untamed rather than farmed land, in part because of her forced labour on the farm. While on his nightly rounds, Caleb thinks, “Judith, yes, she was a problem. She had some of his own will, and she hated the soil ... was beginning to think she was meant for other things ... getting high notions, was Judith. She would have to be broken. She owed him something ... owed the soil something” (15).⁵ Caleb recognizes the fundamental difference between him and Judith, and he fears losing a reliable labourer. Caleb wants to break Judith in the same way that he breaks the soil to demonstrate his control over her. Judith dreams of another life away from the homestead because she cannot bear to work the land that allows Caleb’s success and binds her to the farm. Despite her years of labour, Caleb believes Judith owes him and the soil a debt because they provide life to her. Ironically, Caleb fails to understand that he, too, is indebted to the land. While all settlers share in this debt to the soil, Judith’s reluctant participation in farming contrasts with her natural relationship with unbroken land.

Judith’s close connection to the land suggests a more personal, interactive approach to living on the prairie. As Ricou notes, “[i]n spite of his devotion to his crops, Caleb is fundamentally opposed to the land. Judith, who longs for an escape from the farm, has established a deep and meaningful connection with the land and its rhythms” (76). Judith sees the land as more than property, and she returns to it throughout the novel because it allows her to forget the drudgery of working for Caleb. Furthermore, as Faye Hammill notes in “The Sensations of the 1920s: Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* and Mazo de la Roche’s *Jalna*,” Ostenso’s portrayal of Judith’s sexual emergence “parallels the depiction of landscape” (83). Judith’s deep connection to the land allows her to understand her own sexual needs and desires. As the narrator notes, from her perspective, Judith understands that the land is alive and responsive to human interactions with it: “Oh, how knowing the bare earth was, as if it might have a heart and a mind hidden here in the woods. The fields that Caleb had tilled had no tenderness, she knew. But here was something forbiddenly beautiful, secret as one’s own body”

⁵ When the narrator of Ostenso’s novel presents the thoughts of characters, ellipses proliferate. These are presented in this thesis without square brackets, to distinguish them from my ellipses.

(59). In this quiet moment by a pool, Judith attunes herself to the secrets of the soil and realizes that she is different from the rest of her family members. This realization changes her mindset as she recognizes all the possibilities that exist off the farm; she dreams of freedom from the heavy burden of her labour and an exciting future away from her family. Through the recognition of the untouched beauty of that place, Judith develops a close relationship with the land that rejects the greed-based approach Caleb favours.

After this important realization, Judith experiences her first moment of sexual awakening, and she returns to untilled areas when she begins her physical relationship with Sven. Her moments of communion with the land eventually free Judith from the homestead and mark her entry into womanhood. Harrison argues that in *Wild Geese* there exists an “identification between the land and woman and the whole unconscious world of impulse and desire” (113). Judith’s yearnings extend beyond physical gratification; she also wants to free herself from Caleb’s tyranny. These two desires reveal themselves as Judith masturbates on the unbroken land and at the same time contemplates her overwhelming hatred of Caleb. Unlike Caleb’s relationship with the land, which relies on stolen touches and nighttime visits, Judith openly enjoys the land as she reflects on the hopelessness of her situation: “She was ugly beyond all bearing, and all her life was ugly. Suddenly she was bursting with hatred of Caleb. Her large, strong body lay rigid on the ground, and was suddenly unnatural in that earthy place. Then she relaxed and wept like a woman” (59-60). Judith’s relationship with the land and her hatred for Caleb come together in this intense moment of sexual release. Her advent into womanhood accompanies her understanding that her life as a tiller of the soil is ugly and unsustainable. Accordingly, her first sexual encounter with Sven occurs on untilled land, in “a dense growth of spruce and cedar” near Yellow Post (103), and the couple continue their relationship beside the pool of Judith’s first experience. The land provides a private place for the pair to develop their relationship, which results in Judith conceiving a child. With the conception of the child, the earth blesses the settler-invader couple, their offspring, and the ongoing settlement of the country.

While imprisoned on the homestead after Caleb discovers her relationship with Sven, Judith fears for her life and the life of her baby. Judith remembers the tragic fate of an Indigenous woman who was pregnant out of wedlock: “A halfbreed girl from Yellow Post two or three years before had tried to kill her baby, and she had been sent to prison for it. Prison—a

place where you were confined to a tiny cell and never saw the sky, or felt the wind on your face—a wretched place, worse perhaps, than this farm” (226-27). The comparison of her fate to that of the Indigenous girl reveals that Judith fears the confinement of a prison cell almost as much as she fears her perpetual existence on the farm. The narrator mentions the Indigenous woman to provide context to Judith’s dread of confinement and connects the two women through their pregnancies, but Ostenso’s narrator expects readers to accept the fate of that other woman. However, readers understand and even sympathize with Judith’s crime, the attempted murder of her tyrannical father (216). The comparison to the Indigenous girl emphasizes the desperation Judith feels at being trapped on the homestead, unable to return to the natural areas from which she draws strength.

On the night of the harvest dance, the land remembers its close relationship with Judith and conspires to support her planned escape to the city. On her way to Nykerk with Sven to catch the train, the eerie October night reflects Judith’s unease about her escape: “It was starlight now and the wind had risen. The dry-leafed branches along the road rubbed each other and made an uncanny sound” (302). The wind and the trees complement Judith’s feelings of unease. The use of the term *uncanny* carries significant meaning as Judith leaves home for the first time. Freud defines the uncanny as something “familiar” that has been repressed (240). In this moment of flight, Judith once again becomes aware of the familiarity of her natural surroundings that she repressed during her imprisonment. Furthermore, Caleb’s poisoning of her relationship with the land caused her to distrust it, but as she begins her new life, she recognizes the sounds of the natural land she loves urging the couple forward as the wind fuels the fire that aids their escape.

Problematic Depictions of Indigenous Characters

The novel’s portrayal of Indigenous characters contrasts startlingly with the depiction of well-regarded members of the settler community. The narrator silences Indigenous inhabitants and implies that their ill-nature hinders the success of the community. During her first day teaching the children of Oeland, Lind takes attendance and mentally catalogues her students: “‘Thorvaldson—Sophia, Anna, Una,’ [...] three little girls in the foreground with pigtails as white as snow. Behind them sat two boys from Yellow Post, half Cree, who did not know their last names and looked back in great fright to their elder brother who sat in the rear” (20). Ostenso’s narrator privileges settler students with their white skin and hair. The girls have first and last names and sit prominently in the front row. In contrast, the narrator does not name the

Indigenous students, who are placed literally and figuratively behind settler students. The boys are fearful and do not know how to behave in this context. By connecting their lack of knowledge about their last names to their indigeneity, Ostenso casts these children as Others and implies that they are incapable and uncomfortable in the classroom, especially in comparison with the settler-invader children.

The narrator purposefully focuses on the boys' indigeneity to reinforce settler-invader claims to the land. Wolfe's theory of elimination provides a useful context from which to view the classroom scenes. He discusses the settler-invader mentality that insists on defining the land's original inhabitants by their indigeneity: for Indigenous peoples, "non-Indian ancestry compromised their indigeneity, producing 'half-breeds' [...]. As opposed to enslaved peoples, whose reproduction augmented their owners' wealth, Indigenous people obstructed settlers' access to land, so their increase was counterproductive. In this way, the restrictive racial classification of Indians straightforwardly furthered the logic of elimination" (388). Settler-invaders rely on unobstructed access to all land within a given territory. As the descendants of Canada's original inhabitants, these boys represent a barrier to settler property rights. By insisting that these children are "half Cree," the narrator passively subscribes to the elimination of these students from the land; the lack of information on their European background implies that these students cannot identify themselves as whole persons. Their difference in skin tone becomes a means of separating the students and allows the narrator to privilege the "whiteness" of Scandinavian children. The boys are not part of the settler community of Oeland and are voiceless in this interaction. The narrator's perspective stays firmly with Lind and her prejudiced understanding of the boys' identity in this colonial space.

The men who loiter at the general store in Yellow Post are other unnamed, voiceless Indigenous characters. Ostenso's narrator mentions this group of men twice in the novel, when Lind and Judith visit Yellow Post on shopping trips. During both occasions, the men have nothing to do but follow Lind into the store with the intent of watching her: "A few halfbreeds ventured into the store after her, to skulk about with furtive glances" (99). Ostenso's word choices are full of negative connotations. The men do not walk around the store; they skulk. The cowardly, deceitful implications of their movements and their gaze indicate an untrustworthy sentiment felt by either Lind or the settler-invader narrator. The men follow Lind and glance at her secretively, which suggests that their intentions toward her are reprehensible or immoral. The

narrator repeats the negative descriptions of the men during Lind's next visit to the store: "Lind, followed by the nudges and leering eyes of the halfbreeds who hung about, came up to Jude, who introduced her to Sven" (101). Here the men's looks become distinctly sexualized as they express their desire for Lind and Jude in their gaze and their nudges. Ostenso's narrator repeats the stereotypical view of Indigenous males' sexualized gaze, which Elizabeth Bird explains in "Savage Desires: The Gendered Construction of the American Indian in Popular Media": "Indian males became sexual threats" (66). The narrator of *Wild Geese* reinforces the negative stereotypical depiction of the men's desire for settler women, further marginalizing them. The gaze of Indigenous Others toward the women suggests a violent sexuality that contrasts with the acceptable attentions of Sven Sandbo and Mark Jordan.

Malcolm is one of only two Indigenous characters with a voice and personality in the novel. Ostenso's narrator describes Malcolm as "Scotch, with Cree blood two generations back, and [he] had been Caleb Gare's hired man for three years until a year ago" (169). Caleb rejects Malcolm as a potential suitor for Ellen because of his Indigenous background, and when Malcolm returns to the Gare farm, he desires everything that Caleb has in terms of land, crops, and family: "[Malcolm's] eyes roved admiringly over the rich flax, and around northward to the acres of luxuriant tame hay and rye grass. Caleb Gare was a prosperous man. A mean man, he knew, but his children would live after him—his children would be established in comfort for the rest of their lives on this land—and he, Malcolm, was a wanderer, hearing ever a call in the wind, a summons to far lakes and lonely forests" (172). The narrator suggests that Malcolm desires the wealth, ownership, and success that come with agricultural settlement. However, the use of "lonely, nomadic Indian" stereotype implies that Malcolm leaves this territory because settlers have established themselves as the land's new caretaker-owners; therefore, he becomes a wanderer who voluntarily surrenders his land to homesteaders who can put it to better use. Wolfe's "logic of elimination" suggests that this troubling representation of Malcolm as a wanderer is another expression of settler-colonialism: "natives are typically represented as unsettled, nomadic, rootless, etc., in settler-colonial discourse" (396). Ostenso's portrayal of Malcolm as willingly abandoning his land does not provide him with a way to live as a member of the community; rather, she maintains the settler-invader project, identifies Malcolm as part Cree, and forces him to live on the margins of society.

Like Annie in Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, Malcolm becomes dispossessed of his traditional lands, and he wanders the territory seeking odd jobs before he travels to the northern forests of Manitoba to live off the land. During his visit to the Gare homestead, Malcolm invites Ellen to come north with him: "I'd buy a horse for you—we'd go slow, and sleep out nights all summer under the stars, Ellen, and in my silk tent when it rains. I've got an old cabin up north—make lots of money on furs—you wouldn't be needin' for nothin'" (175). Malcolm stereotypically embodies the image of the Indigenous character who retreats from society and lives off the land. He maintains a traditional Indigenous lifestyle that keeps him separate from the rest of Canadian society, and his retreat into the wilderness suggests that he leaves the area to make way for homesteading. The narrator uses Malcolm to reinforce settler dreams of belonging to the land. In "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang elaborate on these settle-invader fantasies of adopted lands: "the Native (understanding that he is becoming extinct) hands over his land, his claim to the land, his very Indian-ness, to the settler for safe-keeping" (14). Ostenso's narrator reinforces settler claims to the territory by having Malcolm retreat from the obvious success of Caleb's agricultural pursuits. Although he wants to be a farmer, Malcolm recognizes that he cannot have the land, so he relinquishes his claims to it and Ellen.

Ostenso's narrator provides another problematic representation of Indigenous peoples in the character of John Tobacco, a Cree man who works as a mail carrier. John does not speak directly in the novel; rather, at the beginning of the narrative he scornfully grunts when Lind asks him about the Gares (2). He has a position of trust in the community and his daughter receives an education that will allow her to teach at the Yellow Post school (173). However, Ostenso problematizes John's existence in the novel through his implied support of the settler-invader presence when he provides traditional Indigenous clothing to Lind and Mark for the harvest dance: "They went to old John Tobacco and got an outfit of doeskin and feathers for Mark, and a costume for Lind ornate with beads and feathers" (281). By giving or selling his clothes, John supports the couple's plan to dress in traditional outfits, which have been relegated to "dress-up" costumes of those wanting to masquerade as people from a seemingly dying culture. Although brief, the scene has an eerie sense of loss about it. The marginalized Cree man gives the clothing of his lost world to a settler-invader couple who represent the future of civilization in the country. The movement of the clothes from their rightful owners to settler impostors mimics the

loss of land while implying that John Tobacco metaphorically blesses the settler-invader couple, their love, and their ongoing presence in this place. Elaborating on this blessing, Johnson believes that the costumes represent “[t]he lovers’ symbolic indigenization under the approving eye of John Tobacco” (132). The settlers indigenize themselves to assert their authority and change their identities in this colonized space. Through the use of these disguises, the couple lays claim to the land; despite not being landowners, their indigenization declares them as naturally belonging to these lands. If they are indigenous, they cannot be settlers in the power-hungry way that Caleb is a settler-invader. The costumes free Lind and Mark from the rules of the community, and John Tobacco’s blessing permits the couple to live in harmony on Indigenous territory.

Ostenso further employs negative stereotypes as she connects the marginalized Indigenous population at Yellow Post to the destructive bush fires which threaten settlements throughout the territory. The store at Yellow Post acts as an information hub for the settlers, and the narrator takes on the voice of the settlers to dismiss the threat of the fires and to suggest that the gossip stems from an Indigenous desire to rid the land of settler-invaders: “There were rumours of bush fires to the north as a result of drought, and Yellow Post was full of bad omens. But the Indians were always ready to predict evil for the white settlers” (181). The narrator appears to agree that the Indigenous men enjoy thinking about the doom of settler-invaders. The evil prediction suggests that homesteaders are uneasy in their tenancy on land that is not rightfully theirs, and the ever-present, silent Indigenous community is a constant reminder of the tenuous settler-invader-Indigenous relationship. The narrator refuses to give the men of Yellow Post a direct voice thereby further supporting the silent erasure of Indigenous peoples from the land.

The Vengeance of the Land

Despite the narrator’s erasure of Indigenous peoples, the land in the novel refuses to comply with the project of settler-colonialism. Caleb values his property solely in terms of profit and schemes to rid himself of the muskeg that mars his homestead. Throughout the novel, the muskeg remains “the sore to Caleb’s eye. In the heat of summer it gave up sickly vapours in which clouds of mosquitoes rose. Cattle and horses, breaking through the pasture fence and heading for the hay field, had disappeared beneath its spongy surface” (12). The muskeg threatens Caleb’s pride because it cannot be made arable, and it threatens the success of the

homestead through the loss of livestock. Caleb hates the muskeg because he cannot control it in the way that he dominates his family, animals, or other lands. Caleb refuses to see the muskeg as naturally beautiful, and he resents it because it blemishes the cultivated perfection of his farm. The muskeg is a constant, outward symbol of the rot that ruins Caleb's successful settler appearance. The irony of the novel's conclusion lies in the fact that the land Caleb hates and that remains untouched by his plow rises to consume him and refuses to let him continue with his malicious homesteading.

On the night of the harvest dance, the land, wind, and fire enact their vengeance. Earlier in the day, Fusi burns willows in preparation for planting the following spring, but the wind fans the nearly extinguished fire, and it advances toward Caleb's flax field (303-04). Upon discovering the threat, Caleb rushes to defend his flax from the fire, taking the shortest route through the muskeg that he no longer owns. Fusi's fire thus inadvertently avenges the death of his brothers and the blackmail that caused him to take over the muskeg while providing the land an opportunity to punish Caleb, an act of retribution that Fusi desires but cannot accomplish (255). In the last moments of his life, the muskeg traps Caleb in its vengeful grasp. As he rushes toward the "taunting" fire,

silky reeds were beginning to entangle themselves about Caleb's legs. They impeded his progress. [...] Then suddenly, something seemed to be tugging at his feet. He could not release them. [...] He stood upright again and strained with all his might. But the insidious force in the earth drew him in deeper. [...] He reached his hands outward toward the flax, as if in supplication to its generous breadth. [...]

The fire was racing ahead. Only a little while now, and it would have the flax ... a fine, abundant growth it was ...only a little while ... ah, the over-strong embrace of the earth ... Caleb closed his eyes. He felt tired, too tired to struggle any more. He had given his soul to the flax ... well, it would go with him. He could see it shimmering still, grey-silver, where the light of the fire fell upon it. The earth was closing ice-cold, tight, tight, about his body ... but the flax would go with him ... the flax (311-313)

Together, the muskeg, wind, and fire work to trick Caleb, causing him to lose his sense of place. The narrator uses overtly sexual language to describe the land's moment of revenge. The silky reeds wrap themselves about Caleb's legs, and the earth pulls him downward in a fatal embrace. The disputed muskeg returns Caleb's earlier covert touches to the flax, but Caleb wants no part

of this reciprocal union as the earth's power overwhelms him. Despite his impending doom, as he struggles against the pernicious land, Caleb directs his last glances and thoughts toward the beautiful flax field as it succumbs to the fire. Caleb's death is not accidental; the land is a vengeful, unwilling mistress that actively consumes Caleb in its forceful, determined embrace.

Tellingly, the earth's vengeance abates with the death of Caleb. Despite the destructive fire, or perhaps because of it, October brings "the languid peace of Indian summer. In the early morning a milky scud hid the horizon, but by noon the entire sky was clear and blue as a harebell. And over everything was a profound silence, as if somewhere a hand had been raised commanding reverence. It was a time of rest on the Gare farm" (314). The narrator describes a feeling of tranquility that appears after Caleb's death, suggesting that the land and the Gare family are finally able to relax after years of overwork and overuse. The term *Indian summer* refers to a "period of unusually calm dry warm weather, often accompanied by a hazy atmosphere occurring in the Northern United States and Canada" ("Indian summer"). While the narrator uses the term to describe a period of warm weather well-known on the prairies, in the context of the relationship between Indigenous peoples, settler-invaders, and the land, this term takes on another meaning. The Indian summer blesses the family following the death of their evil patriarch, and the quiet days that follow the fire suggest the appeasement of the land's wrath. The earth's fury calms after it kills Caleb, and the peace that ensues reaffirms Ostenson's support of the settler-invader project.

With the removal of the tyrant, the land contentedly allows the continuation of the homesteader project. In the city, Sven and Judith produce a third-generation settler, and on the farm, Martin fulfills his dream of building a new home: "Martin journeyed to the city, and there saw Jude and Sven. He found them very happy, and carried this news, together with a plan for the New House, back to the farm with him" (314). The construction of "the New House" mirrors John Tobacco's blessing of Lind and Mark. The dwelling is more permanent than the Gares' original drafty log house, and it provides additional protection against the fear of the unknown in this vast land. The land blesses Martin and Judith after Caleb dies; it becomes docile and supportive upon the removal of the patriarch's withering presence. The peaceful ending suggests that the land will allow the homesteaders to remain on it if they remember the lesson of the fire and treat the earth with respect.

Through the resolution of the conflict between Caleb and the land and the representations of the silent, vanishing Indigenous population, Ostenso's *Wild Geese* supports the settler-invader project. The relationship between settlers and the land is a precarious one at best with the ever-present threat of natural destruction on the horizon. The land haunts homesteaders who fear the threat of the vast, unknown landscape despite their claims of belonging to the territory, and the deaths of family members serve as a reminder of the fickleness of the land which can kill settlers without warning. Despite the relative peace of the farming community, European settlers cannot settle comfortably within their homes because they fear the constant threat of the land. Ironically, the earth desires vengeance for its mistreatment, yet in *Wild Geese* the land seems to support some level of agriculture as long as it remains moderate, unlike Caleb's greedy approach. In its support of the settler-invader project, Ostenso's novel actively removes Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories and depicts the land as an evil force that tries to eliminate settlers from its surface, themes that also appear in Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*.

CHAPTER 3: RESISTING SETTLEMENT: VENGEFUL LAND AND INFERTILITY IN SINCLAIR ROSS'S *AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE*

Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* chronicles a year in the life of Mrs. Bentley as she and her husband, Philip, serve in the churches of Horizon and Partridge Hill, two small settlements on the prairies. Told from the perspective of Mrs. Bentley, who never provides her given name, the novel takes a diary form as she records her marital struggles and the couple's attempts to minister to Protestant parishioners who suffer during the ongoing drought. Along with the physical drought on the prairies, the novel depicts a corresponding emotional drought that infects the couple. In *Vertical Man/Horizontal World*, Ricou argues that this dual depiction of drought shows Ross's "profound awareness of the metaphorical possibilities of the prairie landscape" (82). In Mrs. Bentley's journal, the weather and the land reflect her emotional state as she struggles with the despair of her twelfth year in a loveless, childless marriage. Philip avoids Mrs. Bentley's constant doting and spends his time secluded in his study, while Mrs. Bentley tries to resolve her feelings about her infertility when she escapes the rotting house to which she is tethered. In an attempt to bring familial love into their lives, the couple temporarily foster Steve, an eastern European, Catholic boy who is twelve years old, the same age the Bentleys' stillborn son would have been. The novel ends with the birth of a child, a symbol of hope and renewal, but this child is born out of wedlock, the product of an affair between Philip Bentley and a young parishioner, Judith West. Although Mrs. Bentley adopts the child and names him Philip, the novel's ambiguous ending implies that an overwhelming barrenness remains in the marriage as the Bentleys leave the ministry to operate a used bookstore in the city. Like the physical drought that continues to threaten the existence of Horizon and its surrounding farms after the Bentleys leave, the problems causing the metaphorical drought in their marriage remain despite their shift in occupation and their retreat from the open land to the relative safety of the enclosed city.

On the first day described in the novel, the Bentleys arrive in Horizon, a fictional town set on the grasslands of Canada's prairie provinces during the Great Depression. Mrs. Bentley narrates their experiences from early April to the following spring and realistically depicts the weather that blesses and plagues the prairies. The novel depicts failed crops and dashed hopes that create communities of isolation as settler-invaders realize they are alienated from the land that once provided bumper crops and boundless optimism. While Ross's novel does not

explicitly examine the effect of farming policies on the land, the text explores the consequences of decades of agricultural destruction caused by farmers who did not understand the effects of these practices. The novel contains an overwhelming settler-invader fear of nature that impacts their livelihoods and their agricultural practices. In “An Ecocritical Reading, Slightly Queer, of *As for Me and My House*,” Simon Estok uses the term *ecophobia* to describe this feeling, which is “all about fear of a loss of agency and control to nature” (79). In the novel, settlers profit from the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from the land that allowed settlement to occur, but the farmers can no longer control nature as they once did because of the ecological disaster they create. The land declines to give up its bounty, and the weather refuses to cooperate with the need for rain, making it impossible for settlers to enjoy their lives on the prairies. Ironically, as Ricou observes, “the characters of the novel are influenced by the environment, and yet they themselves contribute to its oppressiveness” (87). The farmers in *As for Me and My House* do not realize that they have created the barren world that haunts them. Despite the drought, they continue to till the soil and plant seeds, but that tillage results in the soil erosion that creates the dust storms. They pray for rain and God’s mercy, and they hope for a bountiful harvest that will restore their faith in the soil. However, the novel refuses to grant anyone a peaceful resolution. As the Bentleys leave Horizon, a sixth successive drought year begins, bringing another of season of barrenness to the prairies.

Considering the novel’s setting on the Great Plains, Indigenous characters are remarkably absent, except for Annie, an Indigenous woman who works on a ranch as a cook and marries a settler cowboy. Mrs. Bentley’s journal contains no mention of any other Indigenous characters, yet she does not remark upon this curious absence, which suggests the overwhelming success of the Government of Canada’s policies of removing Indigenous peoples from the plains. Ross’s questionable settler-invader understanding of the history of the prairies further reveals itself in Horizon’s schoolteacher, Paul Kirby, who participates in a secondary erasure of Indigenous peoples from the land as he skims over thousands of years of Indigenous history and reduces Indigenous populations to a few fossilized remains that appear in the river valley near his family’s farm. Through the removal of Indigenous characters and the elision of Indigenous history, Ross’s novel upholds the Canadian government’s plans of eliminating the rightful inhabitants from the territory or assimilating them into mainstream society; contrarily, Mrs. Bentley’s diary depicts a settler-invader population haunted by the ongoing drought and

alienated from the land that once provided amply for their needs and that now refuses to support their agricultural pursuits.

This chapter begins with an exploration of Ross's use of a subjective, unreliable narrator, Mrs. Bentley, who merges her depiction of the hostile landscape with her anxiety about her infertility. The chapter then moves on to a discussion of the drought, wind, and dust that plagues the farmers and the townspeople of Horizon during the fifth year of the Dust Bowl. Following an examination of the settlers' alienation from the soil, this chapter considers the corresponding strain in the Bentley marriage as they adjust to life in their new home. The chapter then examines Ross's depictions of the novel's sole Indigenous character, Annie, who works as a cook on a settler ranch. Finally, it discusses Mrs. Bentley's use of the land as an escape from the isolation of her marriage caused by Philip's affair with Judith West and the child born because of their liaison.

Barrenness of the Land

Mrs. Bentley's first-person narration provides the lens through which readers view the town of Horizon, the surrounding farming community, and the land. While she realistically depicts the challenges of life on the prairies during the 1930s Dust Bowl, her descriptions of drought and suffering create a highly subjective portrayal of weather-related misery. In his discussion about Mrs. Bentley and her narration, Ricou notes that "Mrs. Bentley's landscape is completely subjective. It is integral to her way of thinking and expression" (81-82). The land and the weather mirror Mrs. Bentley's feelings about her dysfunctional marriage to Philip; she cannot separate the descriptions of her life in Horizon and her marital strain from her portrayal of the drought. While discussing the ongoing dreariness that afflicts Mrs. Bentley, David Williams argues that her life unknowingly influences her depiction of the landscape. In "The 'Scarlet' Rompers: Toward a New Perspective in *As for Me and My House*," Williams claims that Mrs. Bentley "dare not acknowledge to herself how she projects her own spirit into the landscape" (165). Williams recognizes that Mrs. Bentley's description of the barren land reflects her fears about her infertility, and that she refuses to recognize that her inner turmoil about her childless marriage influences her portrayals of the landscape. The isolation she feels in her marriage influences her descriptions of the prairie and the weather and parallels the alienation settler-invaders feel as the land refuses to support their existence.

The citizens of Horizon cannot protect themselves from the elements that threaten to erase the settlement through sheer force. Ricou recognizes this ongoing conflict between humans and their environment, arguing that the prairie “exerts a relentless pressure to return all things to the horizontal” (85). The wind tries to erase the settlers from the land, returning it to its pre-settlement state. Despite the threat of the land, the poverty-stricken farmers living around Partridge Hill have no option but to remain on their homesteads, fighting for their existence: “The last hymn was staidly orthodox, but through it there seemed to mount something primitive, something that was less a response to Philip’s sermon and scripture reading than to the grim futility of their own lives. Five years in succession now they’ve been blown out, dried out, hailed out; and it was as if in the face of so blind and uncaring a universe they were trying to assert themselves, to insist upon their own meaning and importance” (24). The settlers know that they are at the mercy of nature, yet they are resilient in their misery. Although the farmers create their own misfortune, they continue to defend themselves against the uncaring elements that cause successive crop failures. The land tries to obliterate settler-invaders, but their primal need for survival makes the congregation rally against the wind, not around Philip’s ineffective attempts to console and encourage.

Although the novel opens with the Bentleys arriving at their new home, Mrs. Bentley does not distinguish between Horizon and the previous three places in which they lived over a twelve-year period. Instead, the towns blend together in Mrs. Bentley’s diary and Philip’s drawings, creating a universal Main Street that strives to withstand the force of the wind that threatens to remove settlements from the prairies. Mrs. Bentley describes her husband’s art as revealing an implicit disdain for the settlements that cling to the land: “It’s a little street again tonight, false-fronted stores, a pool hall and a wind. You feel the wind, its drive and bluster, the way it sets itself against the town. The false fronts that other times stand up so flat and vacant are buckled down in desperation for their lives. They lean a little forward, better to hold their ground against the onslaughts of the wind” (59). Mrs. Bentley recognizes that, in Philip’s art, the small town with its flimsy buildings struggles to withstand the destructive power of the wind that rages against Main Street as it tries to remove unwelcome communities from the land. As a symbol of the ongoing battle between the prairie and settlers, the false-fronts of this universal main street no longer stand proudly in this sketch; they lower themselves to the ground to save themselves from the wind’s destruction.

Mrs. Bentley's interpretation of another drawing reveals her understanding of a darkness within the earth that threatens the peace of the settlement. The artwork is similar to Philip's other main street drawings, but in this one, Philip perfectly captures the land's desire to remove the town from the earth, a desire echoed by Mrs. Bentley when she examines the sketch:

Another little main street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth, the earth it stands on, the prairie that continues where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle.

But the town in contrast has an upstart, mean complacency. The false fronts haven't seen the prairie. Instead, they stare at each other across the street as into mirrors of themselves, absorbed in their own reflections.

The town shouldn't be there. It stands up so insolent and smug and self-assertive that your fingers itch to smudge it out and let the underlying rhythms complete themselves.
(97)

In this drawing, the horse is a natural, though tired, animal that belongs to the cyclical, natural elements of the prairie. In contrast, the settlement refuses to acknowledge the land upon which it sits, suggesting members of the community stand against each other as they fight for survival on the bleak prairie, rather than coming together for protection and support. The town does not appear natural or at ease, and the buildings remain focussed on themselves and their financial pursuits that capitalize on the agricultural destruction of the land. Mrs. Bentley and Philip perceive nature's ultimate intent—its “underlying rhythms”—that want to eradicate settler-invaders from the land. As perpetual outsiders, the Bentleys identify the negative attitude that underlies the success of the settlement and the wealth of the surrounding farmers, and they innately understand the earth's desire to erase settler-invader communities from the prairies.

Similar to the settler-invader fear of nature in *Wild Geese*, Northrop Frye's idea of a “physical and psychological frontier” plagues the town of Horizon, a sign of the “garrison mentality” that prevents its citizens from settling peacefully in their homes (“Conclusion” 342). The townspeople of Horizon maintain a social contract that keeps the community safe from the threat of the unknown. The closed-minded community members reveal their wariness of outsiders after the Bentleys informally adopt Steve, a young immigrant boy whose father

abandons him (68). Because of her status in the community and Steve's cultural differences, Mrs. Bentley worries about his place in the family and Horizon: "Blood, too, behind him that's different from ours. Hungarian, or Rumanian, or Russian—we don't know even that. [...] To say nothing of what the town's attitude is going to be, and the fact that he's a Roman Catholic, and that Philip's a Protestant minister in a bigoted Protestant town" (69). Mrs. Bentley knows that the rules of the town favour White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant settlers, and Steve's unclear lineage and different faith mark him as an undesirable outsider. Therefore, the citizens of Horizon refuse to welcome him into the community, especially the women who pride themselves on upholding the moral purity of the town. After a series of violent incidents, Steve eventually leaves Horizon when someone alerts the Roman Catholic Church that he is living with the Protestant couple. On the morning of Steve's departure, Mrs. Bentley describes the hypocrisy of the citizens who bid farewell to him: "at the station there was a little crowd gathered to say good-by to him. It's the way of a Main Street" (165-66). Mrs. Bentley understands the duplicity of the Main Street mentality; it actively works to remove less-desirable people from the homogenous community and falsely presents a united front of well-wishers when they achieve their goal.

Despite the safety of its false-fronted buildings and its social rules, the town of Horizon cannot withstand the constant barrage of the wind and the creeping dust that try to remove the place from the prairies. Extending Frye's theory of "garrison mentality," Robert Kroetsch suggests that the settler-colonial mistrust of the frontier shifts in prairie literature, changing from a dread of the unknown to a fear of erasure. In *The Lovely Treachery of Words*, Kroetsch argues that the "rural or small-town setting—not the wilderness, but its edge—somehow remains the basic place of Canadian fiction, as if there must be a doubt even about where the place is. Place threatens to become mere space" (46). Kroetsch's distinction between place and space is important to Ross's novel because the wind threatens to erase Horizon from the land, and the elements refuse to adhere to the boundaries established by settler-invaders. The wilderness no longer exists; farmland replaces it, and the continually shifting landscape causes unease amongst settler-invaders: "The dust is so thick that sky and earth are just a blur. You can scarcely see the elevators at the end of town. One step beyond, you think, and you'd go plunging into space" (103). Mrs. Bentley recognizes that the elements attack and trap the settlers as they fight to keep their prairie existence. The wind and dust blow through town, penetrating their constructed

defences, resulting in the citizens remaining trapped in their wretchedness. Although they are in town, the settlers are helpless against the elements that attempt to erase them from the prairies.

Infertility in the Bentley Marriage

Mrs. Bentley's inability to conceive following the loss of a baby contributes to the couple's emotional drought. While her narration provides many details about Horizon and its citizens, she withholds from readers clear information about her role in her failing marriage. After discussing the history of her courtship, Mrs. Bentley quickly mentions the death of her child: "Anyway we were married. The next year there was a baby, stillborn" (45). Mrs. Bentley does not dwell on the pain that causes her disappointment, yet these repressed feelings make their way into every line that she writes; her shame in her infertility affects the way that she describes the land as suffering under a prolonged drought and unable to sustain life. Her fear of abandonment and isolation influences her journal entries, particularly when she writes about the land.

In the spring, soon after her arrival in Horizon, Mrs. Bentley tries to grow a garden, an activity that allows her to escape the confines of her suffocating home. Despite the ongoing drought, she expresses an innate need to connect with the soil and care for living things:

My fingers want to feel the earth, dig in it, burrow away till the town is out of sight and mind. [...]

I had a garden once. The bright seed packages on display in one of the stores this morning reminded me.

It was the year after the baby was born [...]. (60-61)

Although she tries to repress the memory of her stillborn child, remembrance of that painful year reappears the moment she sees the packages of garden seeds, and her maternal need to care for living things reasserts itself. The Horizon garden seems to be Mrs. Bentley's first garden in over a decade; the return of her suppressed memories indicates her ache to become a mother again. Her desire to work the soil differs from the settler-invader farming impulse: she sees the garden as an escape, not an opportunity for profit. She gardens because she craves a break from the tedium of her marriage, and she revels in the excitement of early growth: "My peas and radishes are coming through. I spent a long time up and down the rows this morning, clearing away the dust that was drifted over them; and at intervals, so that I wouldn't attract too much attention, I made five trips for water" (94). Even though her actions draw the attention of the community,

Mrs. Bentley persists in caring for her garden. Her years of marriage without children and her desperate longing for connection keep her outside in the blistering wind, and she refuses to see the futility of gardening in a drought. Mrs. Bentley cares for her land by trying to keep the dust from choking the plants; however, the land refuses to give her the comfort she desires as it resolutely invades her demarcated space and slowly suffocates her garden.

The Bentleys' solitary lifestyle results in the quiet resentment that pervades their marriage and makes their home a prison. The manse the church provides to the couple cannot protect Philip and Mrs. Bentley from the cruel elements that threaten to destroy the town. As Justin Edwards argues in *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature*, "[t]he house is not a seamless edifice. Instead of standing up to the elements, it is a fragile patchwork that threatens to collapse the boundaries between inside and outside, shelter and peril, culture and nature" (60). The Bentleys' leaky roof and draughty windows indicate the constant attack of elements that unsettle the couple; the outside world invades their home and causes them to be uneasy within its walls. They wish to remain separate from the town, but the proximity of the house to the street makes it impossible for them to maintain their privacy: "The way we're crowded close against the church the light comes colorless and glum all afternoon. It's hard to laugh or speak naturally. I find myself walking on tiptoe, setting things down with elaborate care lest they let out a rattle or clang. Even the piano, it seems oppressed and chilled by the cold, dingy walls. I can't make it respond to me, or bring it to life" (33). Mrs. Bentley's description of the house reveals her true feelings about the town and her place within it. She cannot settle into her new home or her role as the minister's wife. She mutes the piano, an expression of her individuality, because she believes the townspeople think it is improper for a minister's wife to devote her time to playing secular music, but the act of self-censorship results in Mrs. Bentley feeling unnatural in her home and resenting the house and the townspeople. The house should provide her and Philip a refuge from the congregation, but the proximity of the manse to the street and the church makes it impossible for the couple to settle into themselves, resulting in a tension that keeps the couple estranged.

As a physical representation of their crumbling marriage, the house does not protect the couple from the challenges of life, and the natural elements invade their lives, creating a miserable atmosphere. Mrs. Bentley hates the run-down home because it cannot keep the land from assaulting the house. In early June, Mrs. Bentley writes, "[t]he sand and dust drifts

everywhere. It's in the food, the bedclothes, a film on the book you're reading before you can turn the page. In the morning it's half an inch deep on the window sills. Half an inch again by noon. Half an inch again by evening. It begins to make an important place for itself in the routine of the day" (103). The dust becomes a palpable enemy that slowly infects the Bentleys as they settle into their home, and the tediousness of constantly removing it reflects the endless monotony of life in *Horizon*. The dust incessantly attacks the Bentleys' marital bed, becoming a metaphorical reminder of their infertile, miserable marriage. The creeping soil creates endless housework for Mrs. Bentley, who futilely dusts throughout the day in an attempt to keep the dirt outside of her home.

Dispossession and Elision of Indigenous Characters and Histories

While Ross's novel depicts life on the Great Plains, the conspicuous absence of Indigenous characters from his novel reflects the Canadian government's policies of elimination that cleared the prairies for Euro-Canadian settlement. Inadvertently, Ross upholds the agricultural implications of Wolfe's theory of the settler-colonial "logic of elimination." In "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," Wolfe argues that "[agriculture] enables a population to be expanded by continuing immigration at the expense of native lands and livelihoods" (395). In their plans to make settlement on the prairies successful, the Canadian government implemented and enforced policies of removal, such as establishing reserves and the pass system,⁶ which directly contradicted the terms of the numbered treaties and allowed for the influx of settlers who established homesteads. The reserve system forced Indigenous groups onto isolated, often unarable parcels of land that the government owned and administered, and the pass system effectively imprisoned people on their reserves and created a forced Indigenous absence on the prairies that allowed settlement to occur on "empty land." These systems of exclusion conveniently removed Indigenous peoples from their territories and ensured they would remain invisible in settlers' lives from the 1870s, the signing of the numbered treaties, to the 1930s, the setting of Ross's novel.

⁶ In "The Indian Pass System," F. Laurie Barron explains that "the pass system was a segregationist scheme which, without any legislative basis, required Indians to remain on their reserves unless they had a pass, duly signed by the Indian agent or farm instructor and specifying the purpose and duration of their absence" (214). Sarah Carter argues in *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada* that "the pass system operated to separate white people from indigenous people, and to carefully monitor how, where, and when contact would be permitted to take place" (163).

Although Ross may not have known about the pass system, the policies of removal affect his characters. In the middle of the novel, during the heat of a prairie summer, the Bentleys leave Horizon to vacation at a ranch, a shift in scenery that gives the couple a break from the tedium of their dilapidated home and estranged marriage. The ranch belongs to Stanley and Laura, the brother and sister-in-law of Horizon's schoolteacher, Paul Kirby, a friend of the Bentleys. The novel's only Indigenous character, Annie, is described as a "neat half-breed girl" (131) who works as a cook on the ranch. During the Bentleys' stay, Laura assigns Mrs. Bentley to Annie's room. Mrs. Bentley reports, "[w]e've brought a tent, but [Laura] insists I sleep in Annie's room. It's small and stuffy, with pictures on the walls of purebred bulls and stallions, and there's always the thought of the dispossessed Annie sleeping in the kitchen on a makeshift mattress" (134-35). Although she was prepared to sleep outside with Philip, Mrs. Bentley reluctantly accepts Laura's offer of a bedroom. She recognizes that her arrival dispossesses Annie of her space, which Mrs. Bentley negatively describes as a confining cell that keeps her from living with Philip in the tent. Although she does not mention Indigenous peoples explicitly, in her recognition of the loss of Annie's personal space, Mrs. Bentley connects Annie's dispossession with the larger settler-invader dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their territories. Mrs. Bentley does not realize that this dispossession delays Annie's marriage to her fiancé, who works on the ranch. The day before the wedding, Mrs. Bentley writes about her conversation with Annie: "'Why did you put it off till the last minute?' I asked her today, and she explained, 'Well, George you see sleeps in the bunkhouse with the other boys. We had to wait till you were through with my room. Later on maybe we're going to fix up a shack of our own'" (146). Annie and George patiently wait for the departure of the Bentleys before getting married because they cannot enjoy their wedding night while Annie sleeps in the kitchen. Mrs. Bentley expresses some remorse over her invasion of Annie's space and the postponement of her wedding, and she feels as though she should make monetary amends for the displacement (147). While Annie dismisses the inconvenience of her dispossession, she shares her plans for a future living space. Despite Annie and George's plan to live in a separate home, they will not possess the lands that now belong to settlers such as Laura and Stanley who profit from the ranching economy.

Annie has a vital role on the farm, yet she remains in the margins of Mrs. Bentley's narration. Mrs. Bentley's description of their first meeting reveals the superiority she feels over the woman. Even the Bentleys' foster son Steve, who is of Eastern European descent and thus

looked down upon by the townspeople of Horizon (49), thinks himself better than Annie. Although she is an adult woman, she does not express vocal disdain for Steve's poor behaviour after she serves the Bentleys green tea. Mrs. Bentley explains that "[a]fter a sip or two Steve says he doesn't like the tea, and hopes he isn't going to have to drink it for the next two weeks. [Annie] glares with her beady eyes a moment, then tells him he'll get coffee for breakfast" (131). Mrs. Bentley and Steve exert their authority in this strange, new space. Their arrival alters Annie's life, but they remain unapologetic for the upheaval they cause. Mrs. Bentley does not admonish Steve for his discourteous behaviour; instead, she reinforces his rudeness through her silence. Moreover, Mrs. Bentley focuses on Annie's eyes and the threat contained with her look because she understands that Steve upsets the peace of Annie's existence. In her depiction of Annie and Steve and her acceptance of Steve asserting his authority in Annie's kitchen, Mrs. Bentley personalizes the hostility between Indigenous peoples and settlers who usurp the land.

While Philip paints his landscapes, Mrs. Bentley explores the land around the ranch, often with Paul, who explains the geological history of the valley. However, his account compresses thousands of years of history to present Indigenous peoples as fossilized remains of a dead civilization that existed before the arrival of the settlers. Describing her day spent exploring the river valley, Mrs. Bentley recounts Paul's lesson:

In the banks of this very river, he said, only a hundred or so miles away, there are fossil remains of the prehistoric lizards. They lived eighty, maybe a hundred million years ago. [...] Like a solemn young professor in geology he went still farther back, millions and more millions of years, all the ages of the earth set up for me to wonder at in orderly perspective, till at last there were only dust and nebula, and a whirlwind out of space.

And then like a virtuoso he sped forward: mountains to hills this time—hills to the stretch of sandy flat along the river—strange other fossils in it that were men and women once like us. (141-42)

In his lecture, Paul focuses on the geological past and suggests Indigenous peoples exist only through the curiousness of their fossilized remains, rather than as living humans who continue to inhabit the prairies. The near elision of Indigenous peoples eliminates their rights to the land and makes the settler-invader project appear as a natural extension of geographical and historical processes. In Paul's lesson, Indigenous peoples no longer exist; rather, they are presented as dead

peoples who lived on the plains before settlers arrived. As Lorenzo Veracini explains in “On Settleness,” settler-invaders create a fictional history because “in a settler philosophical perspective, the indigenous Other ultimately does not exist” (5). In Paul’s version of history, Indigenous peoples of the prairies are no longer present, and the arrival of settler-invaders becomes an inevitable part of the valley’s story. By suggesting that Indigenous peoples are now only skeletal remains found in the river valley, Paul eliminates them from their traditional lands a second time.

Mrs. Bentley and the Land

While on her vacation, Mrs. Bentley appreciates the beauty of the ranch land, but she cannot connect with it because she thinks the land is evil. She remains a settler who does not understand the life-force that flows through the earth. During an evening walk, Mrs. Bentley feels a negative presence that she ascribes to the land, for she does not know this space and becomes fearful of the natural world around her:

When I rounded a point and looked back and couldn’t see the fire I was afraid for a minute. The close black hills, the stealthy slipping sound the river made—it was as if I were entering dead, forbidden country, approaching the lair of the terror that destroyed the hills, that was lurking there still among the skulls. For like draws to like, they say, which makes it reasonable to suppose that, when you’ve just walked away from a man because you feel he doesn’t want to be bothered with you, you’re capable of attracting a few ghouls and demons anyway. I stood rooted a moment, imagining shapes in the darkness closing in on me, and then with a whole witches’ Sabbath at my heels turned and made a bolt for the house. And now, an hour later, it’s still a relief to look up and see the fleshy, moon-faced Hereford above my bed. (135)

Alone on the land, Mrs. Bentley fears the wilderness that surrounds her, a primeval, unwelcoming presence in the untouched land along the river. The land becomes a malicious force that threatens her existence, and the prairies reflect the bitterness that Mrs. Bentley feels about Philip and their strained relationship. Her depression influences her depiction and heightens her fear the land. The haunted feeling she has as she walks on the riverbank mirrors the unease she has about Philip, and their infertility troubles her as the invisible ghouls she senses in the darkness surround her. She dwells for a moment on the marital strain before returning to the safety of the ranch house. Importantly, as a symbolic representation of the longevity of the

settler-colonial project, the picture of the bull comforts Mrs. Bentley as she grapples with her fear of the land and the loneliness of her existence.

Despite its harshness, the outside world allows Mrs. Bentley the privacy and freedom that are absent from her indoor environment, the intimidating and stifling atmosphere within the manse. In “Ross’s Disappearing Prairie in Contemporary Fiction,” Anne Kaufman argues that Mrs. Bentley finds “spiritual escape from the town” in the land (38). Philip’s refusal to interact or communicate with Mrs. Bentley forces her outdoors, and she prowls the border between town and prairie, enjoying the assault of the elements, because she desperately wants to feel something, even the cruelty of the wind as it tries to erase Horizon from the landscape. As she says of one of these occasions, “I stood against the south wall of the elevator, letting the wind nail me there. It was a dark, deep wind; like a great blind tide it poured to the north again. The earth where I stood was like a solitary rock in it. I cowered there with a sense of being unheeded, abandoned” (227). Mrs. Bentley allows the prairie to attack her while she deals with the pain of a loveless marriage. The land anchors her, but it provides no comfort, and Mrs. Bentley remains alone in her misery as the wind flows around her. She holds fast to the grain elevator that gives her a solid support to withstand the wind’s attack. Despite her feelings of isolation, Mrs. Bentley clings to the physical representation of settlement on the prairies because it provides physical support to her and liberation from the prying eyes of Horizon. By clinging to the grain elevator, the once ubiquitous marker of settlement that represented the economic success of farming, Mrs. Bentley indicates her reliance on the prosperity of these farming communities, despite her desire to leave them behind her.

As the relationship between Philip and Mrs. Bentley deteriorates, she leaves the house for daily walks alone or with her dog, El Greco. Her walks become habitual, and she takes comfort in nature’s reflection of her depression: “We went as far as the ravine again. Down in the creek bed the wind didn’t reach us, and we stayed there nestled together all afternoon. It was bleak and desolate, but I was in the mood for it” (190). She both desires escape from Horizon and fears the wilderness beyond the town limits; therefore, she sticks to the relative safety of the settler-invader infrastructure because it anchors her within the vast prairie space. The railway represents the ongoing settler presence on the land: it connects settler-invaders to the rest of the country; it allows money to flow in and out of farming communities; and its construction relied on the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from the prairies. Mrs. Bentley wants to escape from the

inquisitive members of the community, but she does not want to be on the open land. Instead, she follows the railway tracks, clinging to this infrastructure because it supplies a solid foundation from which she can work out her feelings of abandonment and isolation.

As she writes about her troubled marriage, Mrs. Bentley's diary entries about the weather reflect her turmoil. On the day after Philip's sexual encounter with Judith, Mrs. Bentley broods over Philip's adultery, then writes, "I must stop this, though. The rain's so sharp and strong it crackles on the windows just like sand. There's a howl in the wind, and as it tugs at the house and rushes past we seem perched up again all alone somewhere on an isolated little peak" (178). Mrs. Bentley cannot vocalize her anger and disbelief at Philip's adultery, which come out instead in her description of the weather. The rain refuses to allow Mrs. Bentley to think quietly about her situation as it attacks her within her home; the sharpness of the rain reflects the pain that Mrs. Bentley suffers as she tries to understand the internal wounds caused by Philip and Judith's liaison. In collusion with the rain, the wind expresses the rage, fear, and estrangement Mrs. Bentley feels as it noisily disturbs the peace of the house and further isolates the Bentleys from the town and each other.

As Mrs. Bentley tries to reclaim Philip's affection and plans their retirement from the ministry, her decision to adopt Judith's baby leads to Judith's death on the land. On March 5, one month before the birth of the baby, Mrs. Bentley writes, "I told him he must make her understand that once we take the baby she is never to see it again—that she is never to see even me. I want it to be my baby—my son. I won't let her remind me that it isn't" (222). Mrs. Bentley cruelly plans to separate Judith from her child, thereby ensuring that her plans to become a mother remain intact. However, when Judith realizes the couple's arrangement, she leaves the safety of her home to wander the fields, which leads to her death: "About dusk a neighbor boy out hunting cattle found her resting on a stone pile, cold and ill already, and wandering in her mind" (229). The land treacherously aids Mrs. Bentley in her plan to take Judith's baby away from her. Judith gives birth that night and dies the next morning. Despite this tragic death, Mrs. Bentley delights in Judith's removal from their lives: "For me it's easier this way. It's what I've secretly been hoping for all along. I'm glad she's gone—glad—for her sake as much as ours" (230). The harshness of the land makes it easier for the Bentleys to adopt Judith's baby, and Mrs. Bentley admits her secret wishes regarding Judith's demise, which ensures that Philip can no longer stray with her. The land that provided no comfort to Mrs. Bentley during her year in Horizon

unexpectedly makes it possible for her to have the baby she desperately desires and allows the couple to escape the hypocrisy of their ministry to live in the city.

In Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, the land and the weather become active agents of destruction as they try to remove settlers from territory that once belonged to Indigenous populations who are mostly absent from the novel. The Bentleys and their congregations suffer physically, emotionally, and spiritually from the harshness of the weather and the subsequent alienation from the land. The land's attacks combined with the fear of the earth makes it impossible for the novel's characters to prosper from the nutritionally depleted soil or enjoy their lives on the harsh prairie. Furthermore, Ross's novel removes Indigenous peoples from the Bentleys' year in Horizon, resulting in the implied support of the government's policies of removal and assimilation; the missing Indigenous presence reflects settler-invader attempts to remove Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories and sustains the settler-colonial project on the prairies.

Like the physical drought that continues to threaten the existence of Horizon and its surrounding farms after the Bentleys leave, the problems causing the metaphorical drought in their marriage are unresolved. The harshness of the land and the difficulties of twelve years of subsistence living while ministering to the church poison the Bentleys as they try to provide spiritual guidance to their congregations. In her writing, Mrs. Bentley's fears regarding her childless marriage reflect settler fears of the land, while the endless wind and drought similarly impose themselves within her journal. At the novel's conclusion, Mrs. Bentley has the baby that she desires, but the child does not promise a cheerful resolution to the couple's desolate marriage. An uneasy peace descends on the Bentleys as they retreat from the open prairie to the city. Like Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, Ross's novel reaffirms the presence of settler-invaders on the land with the birth and adoption of Judith's baby. Baby Philip will grow up in a city that provides the Bentleys with more protection from the dust, drought, and wind that afflicts settler-invaders and intentionally tries to remove them from the land.

CHAPTER 4: REMAKING COYOTE IN THE SETTLER-INVADER IMAGE IN SHEILA WATSON'S *THE DOUBLE HOOK*

Published in 1959, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* depicts a fragmented settler-invader community that lives on appropriated Indigenous lands and that eventually comes together through the birth of a child. Set in a drought-ridden wasteland, the novel contains a small cast of dispossessed Indigenous peoples, settlers, and the Indigenous trickster demi-god Coyote. In this strange valley, settler-invaders search for meaning in their lives as they try to survive the drought that curses the land, and Indigenous people are disconnected from their traditional ways of knowing. Besides Kip, a lone male, four families live in the valley: the Potters, including the matriarch Mrs. Potter and her children James, Greta, and William, who is married to Ara; the Wagners, comprised of the matriarch Widow Wagner and her children Heinrich and Lenchen, who is pregnant with James Potter's child; Theophil, with whom Angel lives with her children at the beginning of the novel; and Felix Prosper, the father of Angel's children and her former partner.

Watson's novel portrays the difficult relationship between the land, settlers, and Indigenous peoples, but in revising her early drafts for publication, she purposefully removed identifiers of culture from her characters, making it difficult to determine who she imagined as Indigenous and who as Euro-Canadian. Despite these revisions, some clues remain in the published version of the novel that allow readers to understand the conflictual relationship between Indigenous characters and settlers who took their land. An exploration of the interactions between the characters of *The Double Hook* reveals Canada's historic tensions caused by government policies that removed Indigenous peoples from their territories and forced them into subsistence living on inadequate reserves. As Alan Lawson states in "Postcolonial Theory and the 'Settler' Subject," these circumstances expose "the very place where the processes of colonial power as negotiation, as transactions of power, are most visible" (153). *The Double Hook* reveals these power negotiations in the treatment of Indigenous characters, who are forced onto reserves or who wander the land searching for their lost culture. In Watson's text, the deaths of two Indigenous women and the blinding of an Indigenous male result in a shift in power away from Indigenous peoples to settlers.

Watson acknowledges that in *The Double Hook* she was writing about the Cariboo region. She lived in the community of Dog Creek in the Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation and

taught settler children from 1934 to 1936; Indigenous children of the area were sent to residential schools (Flahiff, *Always Someone* 34-45). The settlement of Dog Creek is located on the lands of the Secwépemc (Shuswap), a semi-nomadic people whose traditional territory covers approximately 145,000 square kilometres in what is now Interior British Columbia (Secwépemc Cultural Education Society).⁷ When discussing her years at Dog Creek, Watson states, “I went to teach in the Cariboo where I sank roots which I’ve never really been able to disentangle” (Flahiff, *Always Someone* 39). Her experience at Dog Creek affected her deeply, and she asserts that in writing the novel she “wanted to do something about the West, which wasn’t a Western; and about Indians which wasn’t about ... Indians” (“Sheila Watson in Her Own Words” 164). Interestingly, Watson claims that she wanted to write about the Indigenous population at Dog Creek, but she wanted her text to be universal, too. She recognized the horrors of colonization, particularly those wrought by various European invaders of the Secwépemc territory, and she included these injustices in her novel.

In *The Double Hook*, Watson uses European and Indigenous mythologies to create a story that moves beyond regionalism to represent the importance of shared histories in creating a unified settler community; however, in creating a universalized narrative, she elides and dispossesses Indigenous peoples. Watson becomes a passive participant in the country’s narrative of colonization, especially when considering the novel’s fixed position in the canon of Canadian literature. Her decision to include Coyote is of particular interest because she reshapes Coyote to fit well-known settler-invader mythologies, resulting in a problematic appropriation of culture that refuses to acknowledge Coyote’s people or his lands. Furthermore, Watson removes Indigenous language and culture from her Coyote, creating a hybrid character who watches over and eventually blesses the settler community. Speaking on the importance of language to Secwépemc stories in *Secwépemc People, Land, and Laws*, Chief Ronald Ignace explains that stories “require knowledge of the Secwépemc language and the ways that past Secwépemc people communicated knowledge” (23). Without the language or the knowledge of the culture, Coyote takes on an altered significance. In her novel, Watson chooses pieces of Secwépemc culture that help her with her narrative, such as Coyote, but she removes national or cultural indicators that would provide readers with a deeper understanding of the colonizing dynamics

⁷ The Secwépemc are members of the Norther Shuswap Tribal Council who are transitioning into stage five treaty negotiations with Canada and British Columbia (*British Columbia Treaty Commission*).

affecting characters in her novel. Although Watson believed she was honoring Indigenous peoples, her novel supports the settler-invader project through the purposeful erasure of indigeneity and the problematic representation of the mythic figure of Coyote, who watches over the community and ultimately blesses the ongoing presence of settler-invaders on unceded Secwépemc lands.

This chapter begins with an examination of Watson's use of modernist devices in *The Double Hook*, specifically her fragmented narrative, multiple perspectives, and allusions to well-known mythologies. After discussing the myth of the Fisher King and the trope of the wasteland, this chapter examines Watson's hybridized depiction of the Indigenous trickster god, Coyote, before moving on to discuss the drought-ridden valley that is Coyote's creation. The chapter then explores Watson's pre-publication revisions which saw her remove cultural markers in her aim to craft a universal text. Despite these revisions, some clues remain to indicate the indigeneity of characters; the interactions of these Indigenous characters reveal an important sub-text in the novel that implies Watson's support for the settler colonial project. This chapter discusses Mrs. Potter's ghost, her original presentation as an Indigenous woman, her refusal to obey settler property laws, and the implications of her constant search for what has been lost. The chapter concludes with an examination of James Potter's redemption and Coyote's blessing of the settler-invader community.

Modernism, Myth, and Universality

Watson uses modernist techniques to create an experimental and innovative narrative in *The Double Hook*. The novel does not have a typical beginning; rather, it begins with a brief outline of Coyote and the main characters, and then quickly forces readers into the middle of the narrative, a summer morning when James murders his mother. The jarring effect of the fragmented narration disturbs readers as they try to understand what is happening, and the excessive use of sentence fragments heightens readers' awareness of this dreadful moment:

Greta was at the stove. Turning hotcakes. Reaching for the coffee beans. Grinding away James's voice.

James was at the top of the stairs. His hand half-raised. His voice in the rafters.

James walking away. The old lady falling. There under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death. Pushed by James's will. By James's hand. By James's words: This is my day. You'll not fish today. (3-4)

The narrative describes the actions of the characters but provides no motive for James's actions, nor does it provide Greta's thoughts or Mrs. Potter's feelings. Rather, these three characters seem disconnected from their actions; James appears disembodied as his voice, hands and even his words act as separate entities in this drawn-out incident that amplifies the tension in the Potter home. The sentence fragments force readers to hold on to this moment as Mrs. Potter falls to her death, and the lack of quotation marks makes it difficult to distinguish between speech and thought.

The novel relies on multiple perspectives, with no voice more dominant than another. In addition to James Potter's perspective, Widow Wagner, Felix Prosper, and Ara Potter provide the settler outlook of life in the valley and their own interpretation of Mrs. Potter's ghost, while Kip and Angel express the Indigenous viewpoint. These multiple perspectives add to the fragmentation of the narrative, and they demand an attentive reader who makes connections between the characters and the backstory of the community as the narration moves back and forth through time. In "Forests of Symbols: *Tay John* and *The Double Hook*," Joseph Pivato addresses the multiple perspectives in the novel: "The reader is not limited to the point of view of an omniscient narrator, but must learn to make up his or her own mind on the meaning of the action and the language" (188). Pivato correctly states that the onus lies with readers to determine meaning in the novel. The complexity of perspectives makes it difficult to establish the importance of each character's voice or thoughts. The reader must piece together these multiple perspectives and seemingly disconnected events to create their own understanding of the novel.

The Double Hook also experiments with form, particularly in Watson's decision to weave poetry and multiple mythologies into her prose. In his discussion of modernism, "The Language of Modernist Fiction: Metaphor and Metonymy," David Lodge suggests that in the fragmented modernist text, "other modes of aesthetic ordering become more prominent—such as allusion to or imitation of literary models, or mythical archetypes" (481). Watson rejects the traditional linear narrative and relies on allusions to cultural texts, such as the Old Testament, the Fisher King, and the trope of the wasteland, to create meaning in her novel. The main events of the novel take on a mythic quality through the use of allusion and poetry, and the text moves beyond the simple story of a man who seeks redemption to a universal story about a community's quest for unity and purpose as they suffer in a wasteland. By using this metaphor, Watson connects

herself to T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" (1922), which expresses a trope of modernists who explore the destruction of civilization and the subsequent search for meaning in what lies beyond this destruction. Watson also alludes to the Book of Jonah and the people of Nineveh to suggest that the settlers of the valley are isolated from their European traditions; they must develop new connections and create original myths to form a true community in this strange land.

Watson's novel alludes to the Fisher King to suggest that a death must occur to rejuvenate the valley and the community. The Fisher King myth stems from early Grail stories written by Chrétien de Troyes and others in the twelfth century. In one of Sir Perceval's adventures as translated by Roger Loomis in *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*, Chrétien describes the Fisher King as an old man, tragically wounded in battle, unable to walk or father children. To divert himself from the pain of his wounds, the King fishes in a nearby stream, but as Perceval discovers, the king also hospitably cares for his guests by providing a magnificent feast and a comfortable bed. During the evening, Sir Perceval becomes awestruck by a series of wondrous events that unfold before his eyes; however, he remains silent during the banquet, and he does not voice his wonderment to the King. The next morning a lady tells Sir Perceval that his silence actually dooms the kingdom: "Perceval the wretched! Ah, unfortunate Perceval, how unlucky it was that you did not ask all those things! For you would have cured the maimed King, so that he would have recovered the use of his limbs and would have ruled his lands and great good would have come of it!" (Loomis 37-38). The importance of asking the right questions becomes an essential lesson in the myth of the Fisher King, for if Perceval had asked about what he saw, the kingdom would have returned to abundance and prosperity.

In *The Double Hook*, Watson alludes to the Fisher King through her character Mrs. Potter, who also fishes as she searches for something that the other characters cannot see. Although not explicitly stated in the novel, Mrs. Potter searches for her lost lands and culture, stolen during the invasion of her territory by European fur traders, clergymen, and settlers. Watson's reference to the Fisher King myth suggests that if someone had asked the right question about her fishing habits, Mrs. Potter could have provided a clear answer and thereby restored water, fish, abundance, and her lost Indigenous culture to the valley while she was alive. Instead, her death and the death of her daughter Greta allow water to return to the valley; their deaths reflect later versions of the Fisher King myth that portray the death of the king and the

subsequent return of prosperity and abundance to the wasteland. In Watson's novel, the Fisher King becomes a dispossessed female Indigenous elder whose murder allows for the return of the water and subsequent settler-invader success in the valley.

Watson's Coyote

In the Secwépemc tradition, the Indigenous figure of Coyote is a demi-god who teaches the Secwépemc proper behaviours. According to Chief Robert Ignace, Coyote positively affects the people of the Fraser Valley through the creation of the land and the gift of salmon (36-38). Ignace further explains that Coyote stories "are historically situated in the very ancient past; however, as living *trickster* stories, their attraction to present generations is their timelessness" (60). Coyote plays a dual role as creator-teacher, and he connects the Secwépemc to their ancestors, especially to the knowledge held within the community. Coyote stories are integral to the Secwépemc culture because they ask listeners to reflect on their relationships with the land and each other (23). These stories support the strength and knowledge of the community, and they reveal the Secwépemc belief in a living landscape that requires thoughtful, respectful interactions to maintain the symbiotic relationship between the people and the land.

Through the inclusion of Coyote in her novel, Watson tries to uphold the power of the faltering Indigenous demi-god, who was overwritten by incoming European mythologies as settlers moved into the territory and dispossessed Secwépemc people from their lands. When discussing her motivations for writing the novel, Watson stated that she wanted to explore "the problem of an indigenous population which had lost or was losing its own mythic structure, which had had its images destroyed, its myths interpreted for it by various missionary societies and later by anthropologists" ("Sheila Watson in Her Own Words" 169). By including Coyote in her novel, she was attempting to keep Indigenous beliefs alive. She understood the effects of assimilation and dispossession, and she recognized the importance of mythic structures to the culture of the Secwépemc. However, she moved away from the traditional Secwépemc Coyote stories to create a hybrid mythological character that supports settlers who benefit from the elimination of Indigenous characters in the novel. Watson's decision to merge Biblical phrases with Indigenous myths is of particular interest to my examination of the land and the marginalization of Indigenous peoples. The allusions to the Bible emphasize the community's spiritual divide from the cultural beliefs that bind people together, and they allow Watson to convey deep meaning with just a few words, particularly when Coyote speaks altered Biblical

phrases. While she believed that she was honouring the Secwépemc, her depiction of Coyote actually damages the Indigenous deity in the same way that she accuses priests and anthropologists of doing.

Watson seems to have realized that her use of Coyote was problematic. At a lecture at Grant MacEwan College in 1973, she expressed doubt about his inclusion: “I don’t know now, if I rewrote it, whether I would use the Coyote figure” (“What I Am Going to Do” 15). She further elaborated on this idea while speaking with *The Capilano Review* in 1975. Watson explained her decision to remove an omniscient narrator from her novel and replace that narrator with multiple perspectives and Coyote, who oversees the action in the valley: “I wanted to get rid of reportage, the condescension of omniscience. I’ve wondered since about the use of the Coyote figure. I needed him technically at the beginning. Perhaps I could have structured the work in some other way, but I didn’t” (“Print Interview”). The lack of a single narrator means that readers must piece together the fragmented action of the novel; no narrative voice provides background or elaborates on strange events. In structuring her novel, Watson uses Coyote to establish the setting and the cast of characters: she begins her novel, “In the folds of the hills / under Coyote’s eye / lived ...” (3). Watson places Coyote as supervisor of this unnamed landscape, and he immediately sets himself above the others as his controlling interest resonates throughout the valley. Furthermore, the lack of the Christian God as overseer suggests the European community members are alienated, spatially and literally, from their spiritual beliefs. For readers who do not have knowledge of Coyote, his inclusion in the opening lines immediately creates a sense of the unfamiliar; the old, well-known European gods are not present in this strange land because a new god is in control here.

Watson’s Coyote imitates the Christian Jehovah and plays an integral role as creator of the valley. In “Coyote’s Children and the Canadian Gothic: Sheila Watson’s *The Double Hook* and Gail Anderson-Dargatz’s *The Cure for Death by Lightning*,” Marlene Goldman recognizes the similarities between the two deities: “Watson’s narrative transforms Coyote, a Native-American trickster figure, into an Old Testament version of God” (57). Watson’s Coyote takes on the attributes of the Christian God, particularly in the way he affects the people of the valley, but he does not appear as purposeful in his plans. Watson explains that Coyote created this land, but in her depiction, he playfully, almost thoughtlessly, brings the land into existence: “Coyote made the land his pastime. He stretched out his paw. He breathed on the grass. His spittle eyed it

with prickly pear” (6). Coyote does not plan the creation of the land; rather, the land is his hobby, a careless result of his own seemingly bored existence. Coyote’s breath, saliva, and movement cause the land to form in a reactive manner rather than through explicit design. This haphazard creation contradicts the deliberate plans of the Old Testament Jehovah, who commands the earth into being (Gen. 1 KJV). Watson’s version of Coyote has power in this valley, but his depiction suggests that he is lesser than Jehovah because his creation is accidental and contained to this small territory rather than global and preordained.

In addition to his actions, Watson’s Coyote speaks the words of Jehovah or a corrupted version of them, indicating a direct correlation between the two deities. He speaks in short poems interspersed throughout the text, while most of the rest of the narration appears as prose. The use of poetry for Coyote’s words suggests that he is superior to the other characters; his poetic speech follows the lyrical quality of Biblical verse, implicitly connecting Coyote to the Christian tradition. Early in the novel, Coyote sings about the destruction he brings to the valley:

In my mouth is the east wind.

Those who cling to the rocks I will
bring down

I will set my paw on the eagle’s nest. (9)

Coyote’s breath causes the drought that plagues the valley as he proudly announces his supremacy and hostile tendencies. His reference to the eagle’s nest reveals that Coyote rules this land, not the Judeo-Christian God of Isaiah who proclaims, “they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles” (Isa. 40:31). Coyote announces that he is the stronger deity in this landscape as he places his paw on the eagle’s nest, indicating his dominance; Coyote controls these lands and these settler-invaders. He can bring people down or rise them up because he is the omniscient, omnipotent power in the valley.

Despite his power, Coyote fails to support his people as he watches from the cliffs above the community, yipping maxims across the valley at key moments in the plot. After Greta dies, his words reveal his role as bringer of death, not life: “Happy are the dead / for their eyes see no more” (105). In these words, Coyote copies the structure of the Beatitudes (Matt. 5: 3-10 KJV) and corrupts Jesus’s words of hope to offer the gift of absolute peace and forgetfulness to Greta. The implication here is that death is a welcome alternative to the constant struggle of life in the valley. Watson explains that Coyote’s short poems serve a distinct purpose: “What appear to be

poems in *The Double Hook* are actually, in many instances, the echo of Biblical passages which act like the choruses in the Greek dramas” (“Sheila Watson: It’s What You Say” 166). Watson purposefully places Christian words and images into Indigenous Coyote’s mouth to add an extra layer of meaning to her novel. She envisions his role to be that of commentator on the main action of the narrative. However, her plans to honour the Indigenous Coyote directly contradict her creation of his character, particularly in his words and actions. Watson replaces the Secwépemc deity with a version that reinforces the settler-invader claim to the unceded territory of the Secwépemc, and in this depiction, Watson alters Coyote’s relationship with his people.

Writing in the modernist mode, Watson wanted her novel to address the plight of members of Western society who felt removed from their traditions. However, in her use of Coyote, she appropriated the language, myth, and ritual that are integral to Indigenous relationships with the land, and she used them to depict a Coyote far removed from his traditional self. As an outsider, Watson would not have been privy to the traditions that she believed were absent from the Secwépemc. Her settler community does not have the traditional Coyote stories, nor does it have the requisite connection between land, language, and myth that allow for an Indigenous understanding of these stories. Watson’s Coyote takes on Old Testament characteristics because that is the language and the tradition in which Watson and her readers live. In “Sheila Watson, Trickster,” George Bowering accurately summarizes Watson’s depiction of Coyote, suggesting that she can portray “only her own, only the white person’s, only the writer’s Coyote” (193). Watson’s diluted Coyote acts as a weak substitute for Jehovah who is absent from this place. Her novel contains the outsider’s view of the Secwépemc and their culture, resulting in a misunderstood and misrepresented Coyote who controls events in the valley.

Coyote’s Wasteland

As Coyote’s creation, the valley is a wasteland, stricken by summer drought. The community members echo the characteristics of their secluded, desiccated landscape with a corresponding spiritual drought. In *Haunted Wilderness*, Margot Northey argues that the landscape in *The Double Hook* is “a spiritual wasteland which reflects the inner sterility of the characters” (90). The settlers feel alienated in this hostile environment isolated from the lands, traditions, and beliefs of their European ancestors. The connection between the landscape and the characters appears clearly in Ara’s narration. She compares the valley to Nineveh as she

recognizes that the community's seclusion keeps them away from God's influence: "Even God's eye could not spy out the men lost here already, Ara thought. He had looked mercifully on the people of Nineveh though they did not know their right hand and their left. But there were not enough people here to attract his attention" (7). Ara's comparison of her community to the biblical city suggests the spiritual wasteland that threatens to destroy the people of the valley. The community of settlers is too small or too far removed from their traditions for the Christian God to intervene in their errant ways as he did in Nineveh (Jon. 3:11). Out of God's sight, the valley and the characters faithlessly wither under the unrelenting sun, desperate for the water's return.

In the creation of a universal setting, Watson purposefully eliminated all references to place during her revisionary process. Her depiction makes it difficult for readers to understand the troubling implications behind her representation of Indigenous characters, which supports the "dying race" myth perpetuated by settlers. In Part Four of the novel, after James murders his mother, he escapes the valley; as he flees to the nearest town and its railway, he passes a reserve that can be either American or Canadian because each country uses the reserve system to contain their Indigenous populations.⁸ Watson reflects the loss of Indigenous lands and the effects of government policies by depicting the reserve as hopelessly empty: "At last [James] came to the pole fence of the Indian reservation. The cabins huddled together. Wheels without wagons. Wagons without wheels. Bits of harness. Rags and tatters of clothing strung up like fish greyed over with death. He saw the bone-thin dogs. Waiting. Heard them yelping. Saw them running to drive him off territory they'd been afraid to defend. Snarling. Twisting. Tumbling away from the heels they pursued" (81-82). The grisly image of the reserve invokes the haunting absence of its starving inhabitants, who remain clustered together in their cabins waiting for their demise. The description of the raggedy clothing hanging on the line reflects the traditional Secwépemc activity of drying salmon, a culturally-significant, annual community event that was disrupted by

⁸ The British and Canadian governments refused to allow Indigenous people to be landowners and purposefully established the reserves of Interior British Columbia on inferior, often unarable land. Ignace and Ignace state, "settlers dispossessed us of the valuable lands in our valleys, enabled by the colonial and then provincial land ordinances of the 1860s and 1870s, which specifically prohibited our people from pre-empting, let alone buying, land but awarded up to 320 acres to settlers who staked out a claim and built a fence and a shack on such land" (4). The placement of the reserves meant that Indigenous peoples could no longer use the land in their traditional ways, such as fishing, hunting, and gathering, nor did they have access to quality lands to implement government-regulated agricultural methods.

the arrival of settlers and the subsequent loss of salmon-based food economies.⁹ Watson implies that the members of the reserve are responsible for their failures, not the government who forced Indigenous peoples onto reserves, away from the life-giving river. Furthermore, the dogs reflect the fate of their defeated human masters, who seem unwilling or unable to fix the wagons and participate in government-prescribed agricultural pursuits.¹⁰ The empty reserve reflects the myth of *terra nullius* that supports settler-invader claims to this unceded territory, since the absent Indigenous owners apparently did not defend themselves when settlers first arrived in the valley, and they do not protect or even show themselves as James rides by the reserve early in the morning. indicate

While the land appears to be devoid of Indigenous people, the reserve reveals the difficult question of appropriated lands that continues to exist between settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Watson's settlers benefit from a supposedly empty valley that allows them to inhabit the land freely. However, the reserve becomes a haunting reminder of the injustices that allowed settlement to occur. As Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs observe in "The Postcolonial Ghost Story," the "haunted site may appear empty or uninhabited; but in fact, it is always *more* than what it appears to be" (188). Gelder and Jacobs recognize the importance of knowing the underlying history of settler-invader policies that makes a place appear uninhabited. The forced removal of Indigenous peoples makes the land seem unused or unoccupied. Although the reserve in *The Double Hook* appears empty, Watson does not reveal the reasons behind its emptiness, such as the loss of culture, the loss of land, or the loss of children to residential schools. Reading beyond Watson's representation of the reserve reveals the underlying oppression that makes settlement of the valley possible; the land is empty because the government removed the Secwépemc to make way for settlement.

Notwithstanding this seemingly empty landscape, the land in Watson's novel misses the rightful inhabitants and makes the valley uninhabitable for settler-invaders. Besides the drought, which threatens the existence of all life in the community, the land appears poisoned. James complains that "[t]he whole world's got distemper [...]. The ground's rotten with it" (29). He

⁹ The Secwépemc's primary source of protein is salmon, so the communal catching and drying of large quantities of fish ensures enough supply for the group during winter (Ignace and Ignace 153-55).

¹⁰ In "A Vast Inland Empire and the Last Great West: Remaking Society, Space and Environment in Early British Columbia," John Thistle argues that historically, "native people struggled to survive on small resource-poor Indian Reserves; a few corporate and family-owned cattle ranches controlled the best range land leaving small-scale ranchers with more or less marginal land" (418-19). Watson's images of an empty and poor reserve reveal this struggle to adapt to ranching in the valley upon the arrival of settlers, who control the best lands.

recognizes that disease infects the valley, making life unbearable for him and others, and his recognition of this disease compels him to flee. Goldman argues that “the distemper and rot are tied to unresolved Native land claims” (55). She recognizes that settlers suppress their memories of stealing territory from the Secwépemc people and forcing them to live on unarable lands on the margins of the main community. James notices the poison infecting the land, but he does not seem to understand the heart of the issue. The dry, infertile land makes it impossible for anyone, including settler-invaders, to flourish in the valley.

Water becomes a sought-after resource in this wasteland. The permanent ranching settlement requires a steady water supply, but the water refuses to obey the needs of the settlers. Ara’s narration provides a clearer understanding of the movement of water in the valley. She admits that she does not know the source of the water, so she relies on William’s knowledge of the valley: “It comes gurgling up from inside the hill over beyond the lake. There’s water over and it falls down. There’s water under and it rushes up. The trouble with water is it never rushes at the right time. The creeks dry up and the grass with them” (6). William explains his understanding of the water that refuses to flow continuously into the valley, especially in high summer when ranchers desperately need to water their cattle and rangelands. Ara believes William’s opinion that the water does not flow when the people of the valley need it, and the resulting drought causes arguments over fishing in the best pools, as seen when the Old Lady’s ghost wanders the valley. The lack of water also brings tension to community members who live perilously close to failure and death.

After Greta’s death, Ara prophesies that the water will return to the valley, bringing hope and renewal with it. While looking over the charred ruins of the Potter home, Ara foresees the creek flowing freely from its source under the house: “her tired eyes saw water issuing from under the burned threshold. Welling up and flowing down to fill the dry creek. Until dry lips drank. Until the trees stood knee deep in water. Everything shall live where the river comes, she said out loud. And she saw a great multitude of fish, each fish springing arched through the slanting light” (104-05). Ara foretells the return of the water to the valley and all the life, hope, and freedom that accompany it. In her vision, the water and fish abundantly fill the dry creek bed, suggesting that the drought will end, and settlers will soon prosper in the valley. The return of the fish indicates an abundance of food in the rivers that will support settlers on these Indigenous lands, and the water will allow ranching to continue on verdant pastures.

Removing Indigeneity

In revising *The Double Hook* for publication, Watson removed cultural identifiers from her characters. In the afterword to the 1989 New Canadian Library edition of *The Double Hook*, F. T. Flahiff suggests that Watson deleted these references “to realize that sparseness and immediacy that come to characters when they have no alternative but to *be* in their time and place—when they are characters who have no history apart from the experience of their readers” (134). Flahiff argues that the characters exist wholly within the novel as presented in its published form; they must find a way to unify for the better good of the community. For Watson, the elimination of cultural groups and place names allowed the story to be universal, which fit with the ideals of the modernist writers she emulates. However, the lack of cultural identifiers obscures the underlying history of colonization and subsequent attempts at assimilation that continue to haunt the Canadian narrative, and the reader loses an important subtext with the deletion of the history of the characters and the elision of the fraught Indigenous-settler-invader relationship that reflects the history of the nation.

Despite Watson’s attempts to remove cultural references from her novel, some clues remain to indicate that Kip and Angel are Indigenous characters who live amongst the settlers rather than on the nearby reserve. Coyote’s closest human relationship is with Kip, who knows Coyote and embodies his characteristics; this intimate relationship reinforces Kip’s indigeneity. A summer storm reveals the familiar connection between the two when Coyote’s voice becomes thunder booming over the valley: “in a loud voice / Coyote cried: / Kip, my servant Kip” (21). Coyote’s call establishes the master-servant relationship between Kip and Coyote. Kip does not fear the sound of Coyote’s voice or the accompanying thunderstorm; rather, he “rise[s] in his stirrups until the leathers were pulled taut. His hand reaching to pull down the glory” (21). Kip quests for the reward of being Coyote’s servant, but he does not get it because James takes away his power of sight and his ability to serve Coyote by watching others. In a quiet moment of reflection, Kip reveals his understanding of Coyote’s power in the valley, especially his ability to trick others: “[James] doesn’t know you can’t catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. That Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others. He doesn’t know, Kip thought, how much mischief Coyote can make” (48). Kip knows that Coyote wants the glory just as much as he does, but he also realizes that Coyote

tricks humans into thinking that it is attainable. As the trickster, Coyote brings fear and greed into the valley, causing settlers to quest for the glory and to fear the darkness, but, ironically, Coyote does not realize that he fools himself, too. Kip scours the valley like Coyote in his search for the glory, and the implication here is clear: Kip and Coyote disrupt the lives of settler-invaders.

As Coyote's servant, Kip wanders the land, watching community members and reporting his findings back to Angel. However, his voyeurism causes problems within the community and results in James cruelly blinding him (54); this violence ends his servitude to Coyote because he can no longer see things or create mischief in the settlement by sharing information. Kip seems to share a kinship with Angel as she is the only person who mourns Kip's loss of sight. When she hears of Kip's blindness, she moans, "I knew no good was in the wind. Blinded? she asked. For sure? Blinded, she said. Who'll see anything worth seeing now?" (68). She laments Kip's blindness because she knows that Kip has a special connection with Coyote and that Kip sees the world from an Indigenous perspective. As she tends to his wounds, Angel again asks, "Who'll see things now, she said. The bugs. The flowers. The bits of striped stone" (107). Angel focuses on the positive aspects of Kip's sight, not the mischievous implications of his omniscience that cause trouble amongst settlers. Kip sees the beauty of the natural world, and building on thousands of years of shared knowledge, he knows how to read the landscape. Therefore, his blinding hinders the sharing of knowledge amongst his people.

Besides Angel's relationship with Kip, other textual clues remain in the novel that indicate she is also an Indigenous character. Early in the novel, Felix Prosper remembers a comical anecdote about Angel when she thinks a bear comes into her fishing camp, but she really sees a piece of roofing paper flapping in the wind: "Angel had seen the bear at the fish camp. Seen the bear rising on its haunches. Prostrating itself before the unsacked winds. Rising as if to strike. Bowing to the spirits let out of the sack, Angel thought, by the meddler Coyote" (24). As Angel harvests and dries salmon for her family, she bravely tries to scare the non-existent bear away from her salmon. In this moment of fear, Angel blames Coyote for the bear's arrival, indicating her belief in Coyote's power. Felix further confirms Angel's background when he thinks about Angel's features, which he describes as "[d]ark and sinewed as bark" (116). In her actions, beliefs, and physical appearance, Angel retains hints of her indigeneity despite Watson's attempts to remove these markers from her novel.

While the novel retains clues indicating that Angel and Kip are Indigenous characters, early drafts of Watson's novel suggest that the Potter children are the descendants of an English father and an Indigenous mother. In "No Short Cuts: The Evolution of *The Double Hook*," Margaret Morriss examines Watson's early drafts and discusses the critical changes made for publication. These revisions "include[] the removal of most details of personal and family history, of national or racial origin" (57). For the purposes of my argument, the most significant changes reveal Watson's elimination of indigeneity from her first draft. Morriss explains, "Old Man Potter was an Englishman, while no one knows where the Old Lady came from; Kip and Angel are 'pure-blooded' Indians, but William and James (and presumably Greta) are 'a mixed lot'" (61). The Potter children's "mixed" status in the original draft implies that their mother is an Indigenous woman, even though Watson writes that no one knows her background. Watson's revisions are more successful at eliminating the Old Lady's indigeneity than removing the textual traces from Kip and Angel. Only Mrs. Potter's constant wandering on the land, her incessant fishing, and her relationship with Coyote remain to suggest she began as an Indigenous character.

As for the Potter children, they no longer appear as "a mixed lot" in the publication copy-text; rather, they appear as settlers in their ownership of property and their treatment of Indigenous characters. However, knowing that Watson originally envisioned the Potter children as "mixed" brings another layer of meaning to James's actions, particularly the murder of his mother and the assault on Kip. He aligns himself with settler-invaders because it gives him power in the valley. He works to eliminate the Indigenous presence from the land, and the novel rewards him rather than punishes him for his crimes. Watson removes power from Kip—the only male Indigenous character—while allowing the settler to remain free after committing violent crimes. Understanding that Watson originally intended that a "mixed" settler-invader murder his Indigenous mother and blind an Indigenous man reveals the settler violence that propels the action in the novel. In an attempt to provide a universally recognizable narrative, Watson removed important identifiers that help the reader to understand the violence behind Canada's colonial history, resulting in a novel that erases its Indigenous characters and reinforces settler-invader claims to the land.

Throughout the novel, Coyote appears intricately connected to Mrs. Potter, Greta, and James. In his relationships with the Potter family, Coyote acts as a harbinger of death, with

decidedly malicious tendencies. Readers do not know how Coyote influences Mrs. Potter's murder, but they do know he becomes an active participant in Greta's death and encourages James to attempt to drown himself. In his role as quasi "grim reaper," Watson's Coyote strays far from his Indigenous self, and he no longer acts as creator-teacher-trickster; rather, he seems to delight in gathering the spirits of the dead women and carrying them into the cleft of the mountain. After Mrs. Potter dies, she and Coyote are inseparable. Kip sees Coyote and Mrs. Potter together, and he tells James and Greta, "I saw your old lady climb down through the split rock with Coyote, her fishes stiff in her hand" (33). In Kip's first recounting, Mrs. Potter consensually accompanies Coyote into the underworld, carrying her latest catch; her wandering spirit seems to be a willing participant as she finally leaves the physical world. However, when Kip tells Angel what he saw, the relationship between Coyote and Mrs. Potter shifts. Angel shares the news with Theophil: "Old Mrs. Potter's dead, she said. Kip seen Coyote carry her away like a rabbit in his mouth" (44). In this description, Coyote takes an active, predatory role as he carries Mrs. Potter into the cleft like a piece of prey. She no longer appears to have a choice in going with Coyote because he has caught her firmly in his jaws.

As Greta Potter starts her suicidal fire, Coyote's voice echoes in the valley before he takes her with him into the mountain. Greta resents her brother, James, abandoning her, and she barricades herself in their house before setting herself alight. Coyote then announces his participation in her death: "I've taken her where she stood / my left hand is on her head / my right hand embraces her" (75). Just as Coyote escorts Mrs. Potter after her death, Coyote claims Greta with a strange mixture of blessing and intimacy. Coyote uses his left hand to bless Greta, which contrasts with the right-handed blessing of Catholic priests, further suggesting Coyote's revision of Christian customs. The right hand intimately holds Greta, indicating a familiarity between the two that echoes the closeness Mrs. Potter has with Coyote. Greta's self-immolation releases her from the jealousy that prevents her from being a productive member of the settlement and provides James with the opportunity to begin again with a new family. Moreover, the removal of these women allows the remaining settlers to live peacefully and prosperously in the valley.

After he murders his mother, James Potter senses and fears Coyote's closeness, which causes him to flee the settlement. Before James leaves, he betrays the fear he feels after murdering his mother: "Eyes everywhere. In the cottonwoods the eyes of foolhens. Rats' eyes on

the barn rafters. Steers herded together. Eyes multiplied. Eyes. Eyes and padded feet. Coyote moving in rank-smelling” (29). Knowing the crimes he has committed, James reveals his fear in the way that he focuses on the eyes that surround him, watching his every movement. Moreover, he can smell Coyote coming for him, and he flees his home that night. He believes that he is free as he journeys through the wilderness, but upon his arrival in town, he realizes he is not alone:

James wanted to go down to the river. To throw himself into its long arms. But along the shore like a night-watch drifted the brown figure he sought to escape.

He asked himself now for the first time what he’d really intended to do when he’d defied his mother at the head of the stairs.

To gather briars and thorns,
said Coyote.

To go down into the holes of the rock
and into the caves of the earth.

In my fear is peace. (89)

James instinctively returns to the river to find release from his fear, but he spots Coyote creeping along the bank waiting to take him just as he took Mrs. Potter and Greta. Coyote’s power to track James suggests that Coyote would follow him wherever he goes. Although Coyote responds to James’s questioning, his response lacks a clear answer; rather, Coyote focuses on his own actions and motivations in the valley as he describes his previous two encounters with James’s mother and sister. He encourages James to abandon his fear and follow the women into Coyote’s hole. However, James rejects Coyote’s offer of peace through suicide. Released from his fear, James eagerly returns home to Lenchen and his community, ready to take on the role of patriarch. In denying Coyote, James rejects his indigeneity and fully embraces his settler-invader self.

An Indigenous Ghost and Settler-Invader Haunting

Mrs. Potter’s murder starts the action of the novel, but the Old Lady refuses to die peacefully. She is alive and dead at the same time; in life and death, she defies everyone’s expectations of proper behaviour, and she continues to fish along the creek after her murder, searching for something she cannot find:

Still the old lady fished. If the reeds had dried up and the banks folded and crumbled down she would have fished still. If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation, moaning in the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake

head, skimming across the water, drying up the blue signature like blotting-paper, asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom. (4)

Mrs. Potter contradicts the natural order of the world by rejecting her death and roaming the earth after her murder; furthermore, she refuses to obey an absent and absurd deity who would create a great deal of noise and upheaval when it arrives in the valley but does not have power over Mrs. Potter. This passage implies that she would continue to fish even after the water disappears, and she looks for something that she cannot find or that the land can no longer provide. She continues to return to the river in her searches; therefore, whatever has been lost must be connected to the river.

Although readers know she is dead, the other community members believe she still lives. No-one seems surprised to see her fishing on their property, which suggests that Mrs. Potter frequently disregarded settler-invader property laws before her death. The Widow Wagner watches the old lady from her window, and she asks, “what does she want? So old, so wicked, fishing the fish of others. Slipping her line under our fence before my boy can get the fish on his hook” (10). The widow complains that the old lady habitually ignores settler property claims that limit access to resources. Mrs. Potter maintains her Indigenous right to the land and refuses to obey these laws. After Ara sees her ghost, the narrator states, “[t]he old lady fished on with a concentrated ferocity as if she were fishing for something she’d never found” (5). Even after death, Mrs. Potter cannot find what she is looking for, no matter how desperately or constantly she seeks it. In life and death, Mrs. Potter refuses to allow settler-invaders to settle peacefully in their homesteads, and her ghost searches for the lost items that her physical body sought during her lifetime.

Mrs. Potter’s refusal to obey settler-invader property laws serves as a constant reminder of stolen lands that never were surrendered through treaty nor lost in formal conflict. In interpreting the text, Goldman connects the Old Lady’s wanderings to Indigenous land rights. She states, “[s]corning notions of property and propriety and restlessly and shamelessly fishing on everyone else’s land, [Mrs. Potter’s] ghost acts as the trace of an Aboriginal claim” (55). In her refusal to allow the settler-invader presence to impede her use of the lands and water, Mrs. Potter upholds her pre-existing right to her people’s traditional territories. Her ghost continues to

fish as she did in life, looking for an important part of herself that can no longer be found, and she refuses to leave the land, indicating a search for more than Coyote, whom she must know watches over the people. Mrs. Potter searches for those crucial elements of her being that were lost upon the arrival of settlers in the valley: her land, her culture, and her people. In their introduction to *Unsettled Remains: Canadian Literature and the Postcolonial Gothic*, Cynthia Sugars and Gerry Turcotte suggest that “the illegitimate appropriation of Native lands comes back to haunt the Canadian settler-colonial state in the form of gothic tropes that are inherently ambivalent” (xiv). Mrs. Potter’s ghost becomes an ambivalent trope that refuses to allow settlers to live peacefully upon the traditional territory of the Secwépemc. She wanders the land after her death because she continues to search for her Indigenous ways of living and knowing. Her presence serves as a constant reminder of the theft of these lands and the loss of culture that followed.

Mrs. Potter’s ghost exposes the settler-invader suppression of historic crimes against Indigenous peoples. In *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, Renée Bergland suggests, “[t]he entire dynamic of ghosts and hauntings, as we understand it today, is a dynamic of unsuccessful repression” (5). In Watson’s text, Mrs. Potter’s ghost symbolizes not only the failure of James Potter to get away from his mother’s influence, but also the failed settler attempt to remove Indigenous peoples from their territory; the ghost reminds settlers of their illegitimate presence on her lands and the illegality of their claim. As Eve Tuck and C. Ree argue in “A Glossary of Haunting,” “[h]aunting is the cost of subjugation. It is the price paid for violence, for genocide” (643). In Watson’s novel, settlers must learn to live with Mrs. Potter’s ghost because she is the result of the violence that removes obstacles and clears her lands for prosperous settlement. The occupancy of these lands cause settlers in the valley to attack Mrs. Potter for her refusal to obey their notions of property rights. Settler characters benefit from the forced removal of Indigenous people from the land, so they complain about Mrs. Potter’s constant wanderings and her search for something they do not see or understand. Once Coyote takes her into the cleft of the mountain, her ghost does not reappear, suggesting that the Indigenous claim to the land disappears with her.

James Potter, the New Patriarch

Despite his crimes, the novel hints that James embraces his settler-invader heritage and becomes a leader in the valley. After he blinds Kip, James abandons Lenchen, flees to the town,

and withdraws all of his money from the bank, but his escape plan stalls when he realizes that he does not know how trains work: “He fingered the pocket of his shirt. He had no idea what a railway ticket would cost. He’d no idea where to buy a ticket to. He knew nothing about the train except that it went to the packing-house, no way of boarding it except through the loading-pens. All he’d done was scum rolled up to the top of a pot by the boiling motion underneath. Now the fire was out” (90). James cannot move beyond the withdrawal of his money. His ignorance of the trains hampers the apprehensive fear that caused him to flee his home and dampens the anger that led to his violent actions. Realizing that his anger causes chaos in his life, James loses his impulse to escape and accompanies an untrustworthy man, Traff, to the river flats “where the half-breeds had settled” (95). He goes to the poorest area of the town to relieve his boredom as he waits for the train, but while there, he finally understands that he cannot be free unless he makes amends for his crimes.

While standing on a sandbar in the river, James realizes that he must return home to Lenchen and his child, thus assuming the position of patriarch in the valley. James’s freedom comes when he loses his money and any chance of escape after Lilly, Traff’s friend, steals his wallet (98-99). In this moment, James knows that he can no longer flee, and he thinks of the life he left behind: “The flick of a girl’s hand had freed James from freedom. He’d kissed away escape in the mud by the river. He thought now of Lenchen and the child who would wear his face. Alone on the edge of town where men clung together for protection, he saw clearly for a moment his simple hope” (111). James does not attempt to retrieve his money because he knows that the theft guarantees his return to the valley and the life he now desires. His focus shifts to redeeming himself. On his return journey, he purposefully suppresses his guilt while preparing to face the recriminations of his community: “He could not think of what he’d done. He couldn’t think of what he’d do. He would simply come back as he’d gone. He’d stand silent in their cry of hate. Whatever the world said, whatever the girl said, he’d find her” (118). In this moment, James stays frozen in the present. He cannot face the crimes of his past, and he cannot yet see a clear future for himself in the valley. He knows he must receive forgiveness from two sources: the community and Lenchen. James appears contrite for the first time, not for the murder of his mother or the assault on Kip, but for the abandonment of Lenchen and their baby.

Hope returns to James once he sees the charred remains of his house, and he readily assumes his role as patriarch in the unified community. After Greta burns herself in the Potter

cabin, William Potter and Heinrich Wagner start a second fire to finish Greta's destruction (119), which Angela Bowering claims in *Figures Cut in Sacred Ground* affords James the opportunity of "beginning again on the burned and purified ground" (111). The distemper and rot that he railed against no longer exist because the deaths of his mother and sister remove the threat to his future happiness. James now has the opportunity to reclaim his place in the community: "He felt as he stood with his eyes closed on the destruction of what his heart had wished destroyed that by some generous gesture he had been turned once more into the first pasture of things. I will build the new house further down the creek, he thought. All on one floor" (122). James acknowledges the gift of his sister's death and the destroyed house, which brings hope of new beginnings and a new home, notably absent of stairs, downstream from the freed underground spring. The metaphor of the first pasture suggests a revitalized, hopeful life for James, who will care and provide for Lenchen and their child. His plan for a one-story house implies that James will no longer be a violent member of the community as he takes his place as the patriarch of the settlement.

Coyote's final words in the novel bless James and Lenchen's baby and the settlement. The community gathers at Felix's house to welcome the child, and upon James's return, Ara hears Coyote's words echo through the valley: "I have set his feet on soft ground; / I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders / of the world" (125). Coyote's words again take on a Biblical tone as he welcomes baby Felix's arrival, and the soft ground suggests that life in the valley will become easier for the settlers who struggled with the hardpan soil. Combined with James's return, the release of the water, and the new home that James plans to build, Coyote's placement of the baby indicates the child and his community will prosper in the valley as a result of Coyote's blessing and watchfulness. The location of the baby's birth is important since Felix Prosper, who recites phrases from the Latin mass and believes in the Christian God, actively participates in the delivery of Lenchen's baby (116). The implication of this dual blessing from Coyote and God suggests that community members will no longer be alienated from their European beliefs now that this new hybrid god reveals his support for the settlers after removing the recalcitrant members that menaced them. Ultimately, the elimination of the Indigenous threat through the blinding of Kip and the deaths of Mrs. Potter and Greta absolves the settlers from having to address Indigenous land claims; as a result of this silencing and the blessing of Coyote,

the settler-invader presence on the land is no longer questioned and the water can return to the valley, bringing life and prosperity with it.

Through her problematic depiction of Coyote and the removal of the Indigenous threat to peace in the valley, Sheila Watson supports settler claims to unceded Secwépemc territory, which she incongruously presents as devoid of its rightful Indigenous inhabitants. Coyote's blessing at the end of the novel implies an Indigenous benediction of settler community members who have created a new mythic structure from which to build their settlement. The trickster god plays an ironic dual role in the novel; he represents the absent Indigenous population in the valley he controls, but he also watches over and blesses the settler-invader population. Although Watson decided to remove identifiers of indigeneity from the publication draft, she retained one significant scene of Indigenous absence from the valley; the portrayal of the reserve reveals the people forced from their lands. Additionally, Mrs. Potter's ghost challenges settler property laws that allow non-Indigenous ranchers to inhabit the valley, and Mrs. Potter's final departure with Coyote indicates the removal of the last Indigenous resistance to European settlement in the valley.

Although Watson believed that she was honouring Indigenous peoples with the use of Coyote, his profoundly altered character shifts alliances to sanctify the non-Indigenous presence on the land that he created. While today's readers might call Watson's use of Coyote appropriation, her depiction goes beyond simply stealing Indigenous elements. Watson's Coyote actively participates in the removal of Indigenous characters from their territory, and the use of Coyote to produce a new settler myth represents another form of settler-colonialism in that it helps to create a Canadian identity, especially considering *The Double Hook's* place in the canon of Canadian Literature. As Cynthia Sugars argues in *Canadian Gothic: Literature, History, and the Spectre of Self Invention*, "one must construct a past—even appropriate it from Indigenous peoples—in an urgent need to fix a Gothic tradition that would foster Canadian self-identity and cultural sensibility" (9). Watson participates in this construction of Canadian cultural sensibility through the use of Coyote and his blessing of European settlement in the valley. Watson's Coyote fulfills the expectations of his trickster character as his final words suggest that he and the land of his creation accept the presence of settlers who unite through a shared mythic history that contains elements stolen from the Secwépemc people; this mythic history connects settler-invaders and solidifies their illegitimate claims to the land.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese*, Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*, and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* participate in the removal of Indigenous peoples from the territory that is now Canada and legitimize the settler-invader "project of elimination" that allows settler communities to occupy these lands. Despite their occupation, the land haunts settlers in these novels because it refuses to allow them to settle peacefully on territory that does not belong to them. The novels attempt to justify the non-Indigenous presence on the land, but each fictive community suffers from the vengeance enacted by the land and its ally, the weather. Each novel occupies a place in the Canadian literature canon, and, as such, they are beloved by readers who see the history of Canadian settlement, the hardships, and the successes reflected in the novels' pages. Martha Ostenso won a major literary award for *Wild Geese*, which is set on a homestead in Northern Manitoba and contains few Indigenous characters. The novel depicts an English-Canadian family living under the tyrannical control of the patriarch, Caleb Gare, whose obsession with the land and his coveted flax crop result in the soil exacting revenge on the farmer. Similarly, the land torments the communities in Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House*. The novel's innovative diary form recounts a year in the life of Mrs. Bentley and her husband, Philip, a failed artist and struggling minister. While living in the manse, the Bentleys and the surrounding communities are attacked by drought, wind, and dust that attempts to remove them from the prairies. Finally, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* depicts a ranching community also suffering from a spiritual and physical drought. The community is haunted by the ghost of Mrs. Potter, initially conceived as an Indigenous woman, murdered by her son. The novels effectively remove Indigenous characters from the land, reflecting the actual process of attempted removal enacted by the British and Canadian governments.

These novels include settlers who support and benefit from government policies of elimination and assimilation that ensure their presence on Indigenous territories. While *The Double Hook* is the only novel with a visible ghost, the lack of Indigenous peoples haunts the characters in all three novels. In writing their texts, Ostenso, Ross, and Watson omit Indigenous peoples from their stories or place them on the margins, as characters who watch settlers and desire their property or livelihoods. In *Wild Geese*, John Tobacco and Malcolm appear disconnected from their people and their culture. Malcolm longs to farm the land, but he surrenders his Indigenous claim to the land and moves north to hunt and trap in the Boreal forest.

John Tobacco moves across the prairie delivering the mail to settlers, and he sells precious traditional regalia to Lind Archer and Mark Jordan who want to wear these items as costumes. In selling the clothing, John endorses the couple who establish themselves as belonging to this land. All other Indigenous characters in Ostenso's novel silently inhabit the margins of the community. In *As for Me and My House*, Annie is the only named Indigenous character, and she is doubly dispossessed: she no longer lives on the land with her people as she works on Laura and Stanley's ranch, and she gives up her bedroom to allow Mrs. Bentley to sleep there. Ross eliminates all other Indigenous peoples from his novel, but he seems to recognize this missing group in his discussion of the history of the river valley, which focuses on geological history but compresses thousands of years of Indigenous history into one brief mention of a fossilized past. In *The Double Hook*, Mrs. Potter's ghost haunts the community, ignoring settler property laws and reminding the settlers of their illegitimate occupation of the valley. Despite marrying an Englishman, she continues to search for something that is lost and that others cannot see. As Watson was revising for publication, she chose to remove cultural identifiers from her novel, but she kept the description of the reserve in her publication copy-text. The eerie scene indicates the success of settler attempts to eliminate the Indigenous presence from the land and secure settler rights to property.

In their portrayal of settlement, each text depicts death on the land, which ensures the peace of the settlement. The communities of these novels are far removed from their European traditions or from each other, indicating a spiritual drought that corresponds with the physical drought explicitly described in Watson's and Ross's texts. To heal the alienation in these texts, a death occurs that brings the community together. In *Wild Geese*, the death of the tyrant Caleb Gare calms the land's wrath and ends the misery of the Gare family. The novel concludes with an "Indian summer" that brings peace to the land and allows the family to build a new house and repair their family's standing within the community. In *As for Me and My House*, Judith West falls deathly ill while walking on the land in the final month of her pregnancy. Her death secures the Bentleys' escape to the city with Judith's child, and the novel's ambiguous ending suggests a reconciliation of sorts for the couple. In *The Double Hook*, the death of Mrs. Potter removes a final voice of Indigenous resistance in the valley. After Coyote takes her spirit into the mountain, she does not return to wander the land or fish the river. Additionally, her daughter Greta's death releases water into the valley, which ensures the future prosperity of the ranching community.

After the deaths in each novel, the remaining characters begin to recover from the isolation that kept them separate from each other as they develop new stories that bind them together on the pacified land.

As modernist novels, these texts challenge the morals of their societies in their portrayal of sexual intimacy before or outside marriage and the births of illegitimate settler-invader children who ensure the ongoing colonizing presence on the land. In *Wild Geese*, Judith Gare and Sven Sandbo consummate their relationship on the land and move to the city to live with their child. The couple's decision to remove themselves from the farming community suggests a shift in the settler-invader relationship with the land; agrarianism gives way to urbanization, and the settler-invader-land relationship shifts from agriculture to leisure. In *As for Me and My House*, Philip's relationship with Judith West results in the conception of a baby whom the Bentleys adopt before moving to the relative safety of the city, where they will be sheltered from the ongoing dust storms that continue to threaten settlement on the prairies. In *The Double Hook*, Lenchen Wagner and James Potter also conceive a child on the land. Baby Felix unites the community as they gather for his birth and the return of James, who becomes the valley's patriarch and plans a new house on soon-to-be fertile land. Coyote blesses the child and promises an easier life for him and the community. In each novel, the birth of a child, accompanying or following a death, represents a shift in the characters' relationship with the land and ensures the continuation of the settler-invader project.

In writing this thesis, I recognize the possibilities for other discussions about the elision of Indigenous peoples from the land and history. This intersectional analysis would be beneficial when examining the novels of other modern Canadian and early twentieth-century writers. Additionally, an examination of the canonized settler-invader texts in McClelland and Stewart's New Canadian Library editions would benefit from the application of Patrick Wolfe's "logic of elimination" ("Nation and MisceNation" 93). Through the power of mass publication and their inclusion in country-wide curricula, these texts effectively spread the ideology of settler-colonialism throughout Canada, ensuring the dissemination of myths of "empty lands" and "dying races." Additionally, since the land is the key issue in decolonization, this discussion can apply to the study of Canadian or American history, law, and justice. As Canada negotiates land claims with Indigenous groups who never surrendered their lands, and as the federal and provincial governments enter talks with various Indigenous groups regarding the extraction and

transportation of resources, settler Canadians must begin to rethink the way that they view the land. If they are serious about reconciliation, they cannot force settler-invader projects onto Indigenous shareholders. An understanding of the country's long history of attempting to eliminate Indigenous presence from the land will help to ensure a harmonious process of negotiation.

In reading the novels of Ostenso, Ross, and Watson, and in writing this thesis, I chose to continue my life-long exploration of the unjust relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on this territory. Like many other Canadians, I recognize that my home is built on occupied land. I was born in a prairie border town, a fourth-generation settler of Ukrainian descent, and I live in a prairie city on Treaty 6 territory. As a child, I did not notice the absence of Indigenous peoples in my town or schools. I did not understand, as I do now, that government policies kept Canada's First Nations peoples purposefully out of sight from its settler-invader populations. During my childhood, I read the books of Laura Ingalls Wilder, which maintain the myth of an Indigenous "dying race" as a tragic but inevitable event caused by progress as the United States and Canada settled the prairies. In my university studies, I learnt that these pioneer texts and government policies stem from the settler-invader "logic of elimination." One hundred and fifty years of stolen lands, broken treaties, and genocidal policies tried to eliminate Indigenous groups from this country. A natural side effect of the project of elimination was the creation of Indigenous ghosts in the minds of settler-colonials, including in the literary works of authors such as Ostenso, Ross, and Watson, who readily believed the myths of the "dying race." Of course, Canada's Indigenous populations are still here and continue to fight for the land taken during centuries of colonization and the rights guaranteed in treaties but denied by British and Canadian governments. The land remains a contentious issue and a major impediment to reconciliation in Canada. As a citizen of Treaty 6 territory, I recognize that I benefit from the terms of the treaty, while the Cree, Saulteaux, Nakota, and Dene signatories continue to fight for the right to self-government and control of their lands (Office of the Treaty Commissioner).

As Canada moves toward decolonization and reconciliation, an understanding of settler-colonialism is only the first step in rectifying centuries of dispossession. Through my analysis of the novels of Ostenso, Ross, and Watson, I examine the literal and historic injustices of settler-colonialism in Western Canada, but I also realize that this analysis is vital to understanding the

difficult relationship that still exists between settler-invaders and Indigenous peoples. As Eve Tuck and C. Ree explain in “A Glossary of Haunting,” the act of “[d]ecolonization necessarily involves an interruption of the settler colonial nation-state, and of settler relations to the land. Decolonization must mean attending to ghosts, and arresting widespread denial of the violence done to them” (647). Settler Canadians cannot decolonize without recognizing the historic ghosts that haunt them and working to stop the settler-invader violence that continues to harm Indigenous peoples. Settlers must act to begin the process of returning stolen lands and fulfilling treaty agreements, but more importantly, they must support the voices of Indigenous peoples who advocate for changes in government policies. In acknowledging these violent histories and recognizing the sense of unease that affects their place in this country, settlers can move from passive observers to active allies who fight for decolonization alongside Indigenous peoples.

The land is central to the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples. In the three novels under study, the land refuses to recognize settler land claims; rather, it tries to remove the settlers because it longs for the respectful relationship it has with Indigenous inhabitants. Likewise, the land remains the most critical issue in the move toward decolonization and reconciliation in Canada. In “The Post-Colonial Ghost Story,” Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs suggest that “[a]n Aboriginal claim to land is quite literally a claim concerning unfinished business, a claim which enables what should have been laid to rest to overflow into the otherwise ‘homely’ realm of modernity” (181). These unresolved Indigenous land claims remind settlers of their illegitimate presence on the land; they cannot truly settle comfortably on this territory without negotiating an end to outstanding land claims and reconciling with the country’s original inhabitants by giving space and providing support to Indigenous voices in the country’s literature, arts, history, curricula, and legislation.

In *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?*, J. Edward Chamberlin suggests that “we’ve got *two* stories: one is a chronicle of events, how we came to be here; and the other is a ceremony of belief, why we belong here” (227). The settler-invader novels under study in this thesis attempt to construct a history of belonging to these lands, but these stories fail to address the truths about how settlers came to be here. The elision of Indigenous histories and the near absence of Indigenous characters from these texts create a story of settlement that overlooks Canada’s violent history and ignores the voices of First Nations peoples. As Canadians move toward reconciliation, they must become allies who listen to the peoples and stories of these

lands to mend their unjust relationship with original inhabitants and to indicate their support for laws that address and rectify policies of elimination and assimilation. Canada has always been haunted by ghosts, in its literature, histories, and policies; Canadians must address this haunting and the unacknowledged memories of colonization and genocide that they bring with them to form a just nation that honours its treaty agreements and renews its relationships with Indigenous peoples.

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